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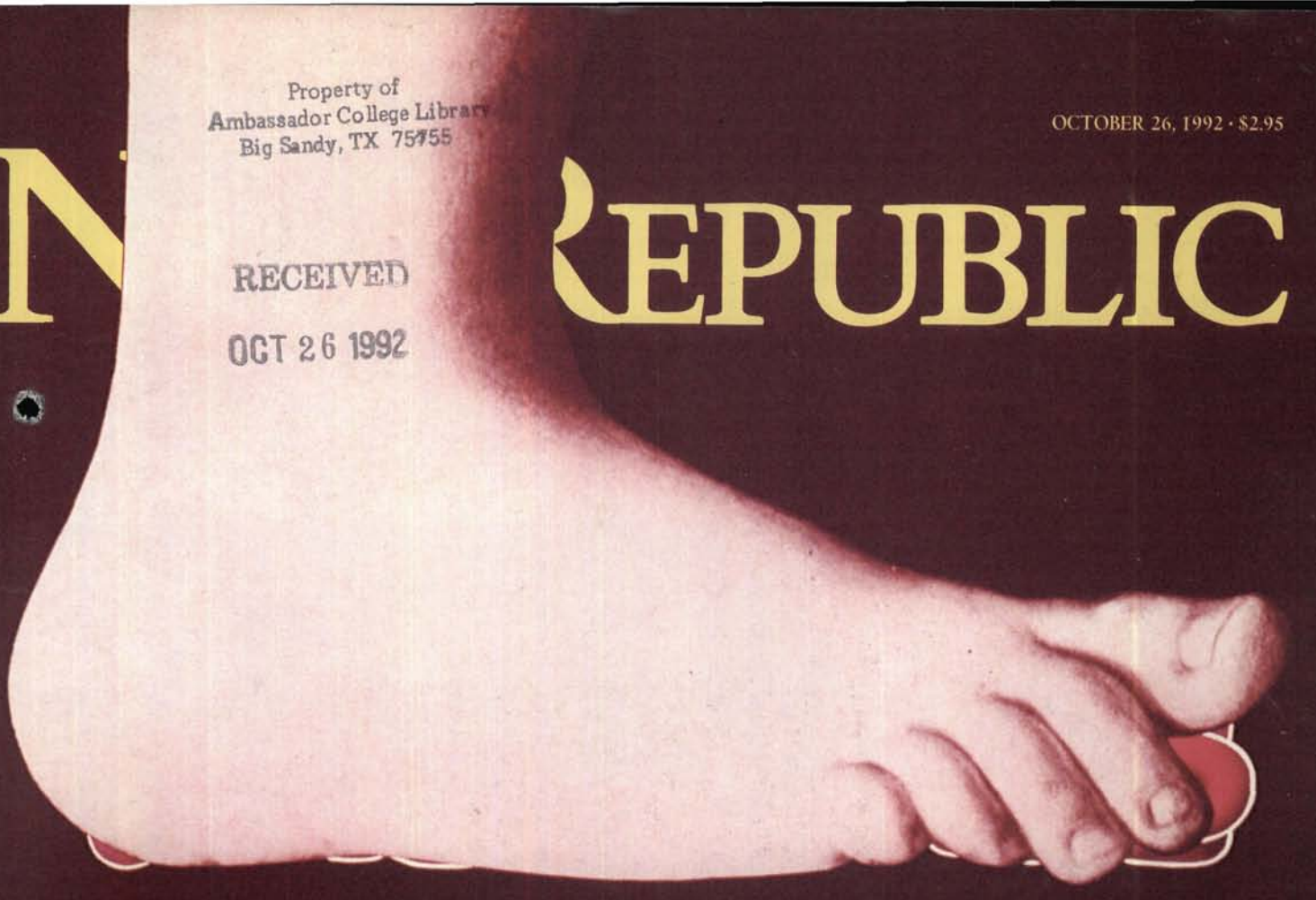

THE DEFICIT

Why It's Even Worse Than You Think

John B. Judis

AN HONEST PROPOSAL
THE EDITORS

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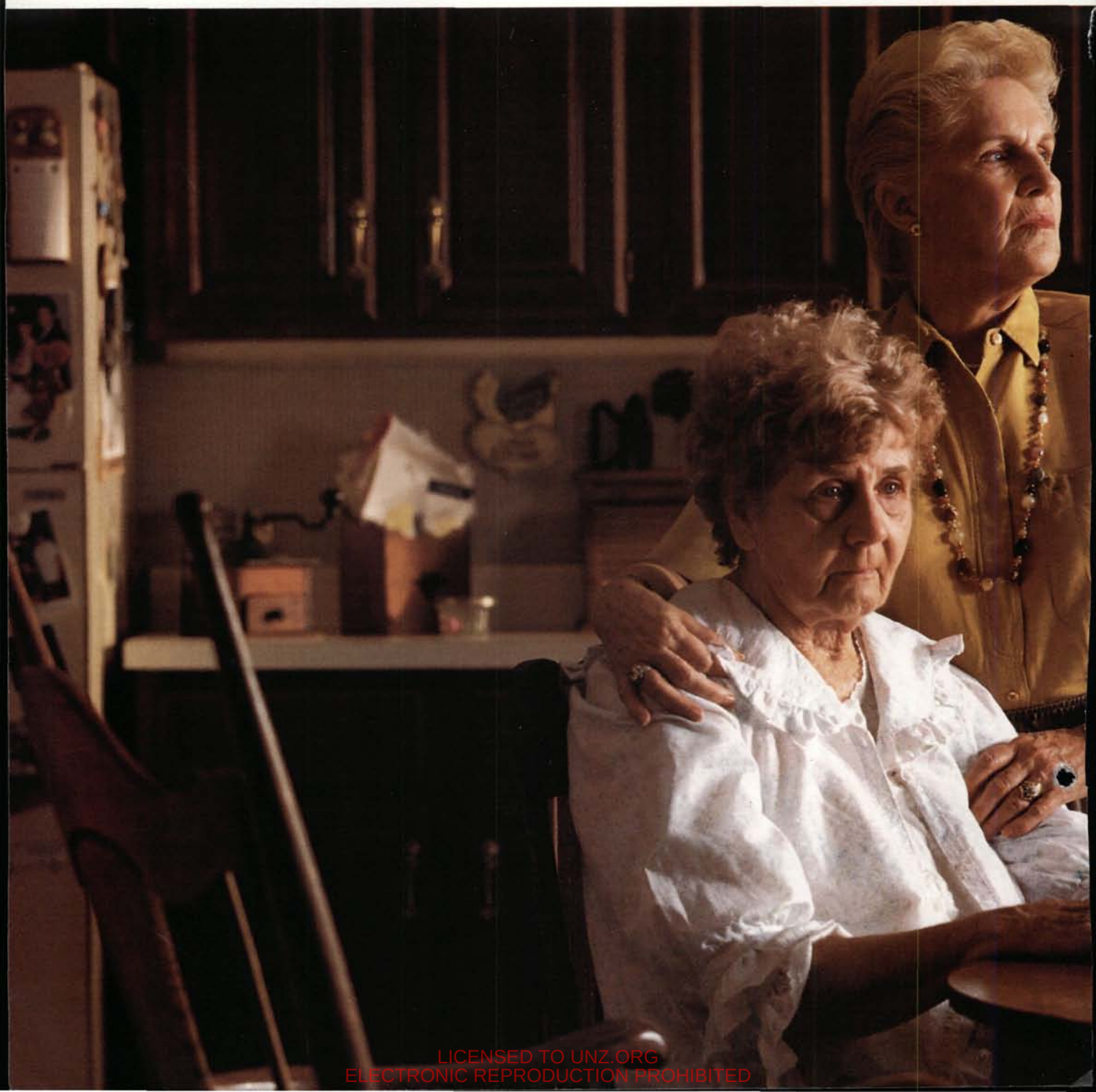

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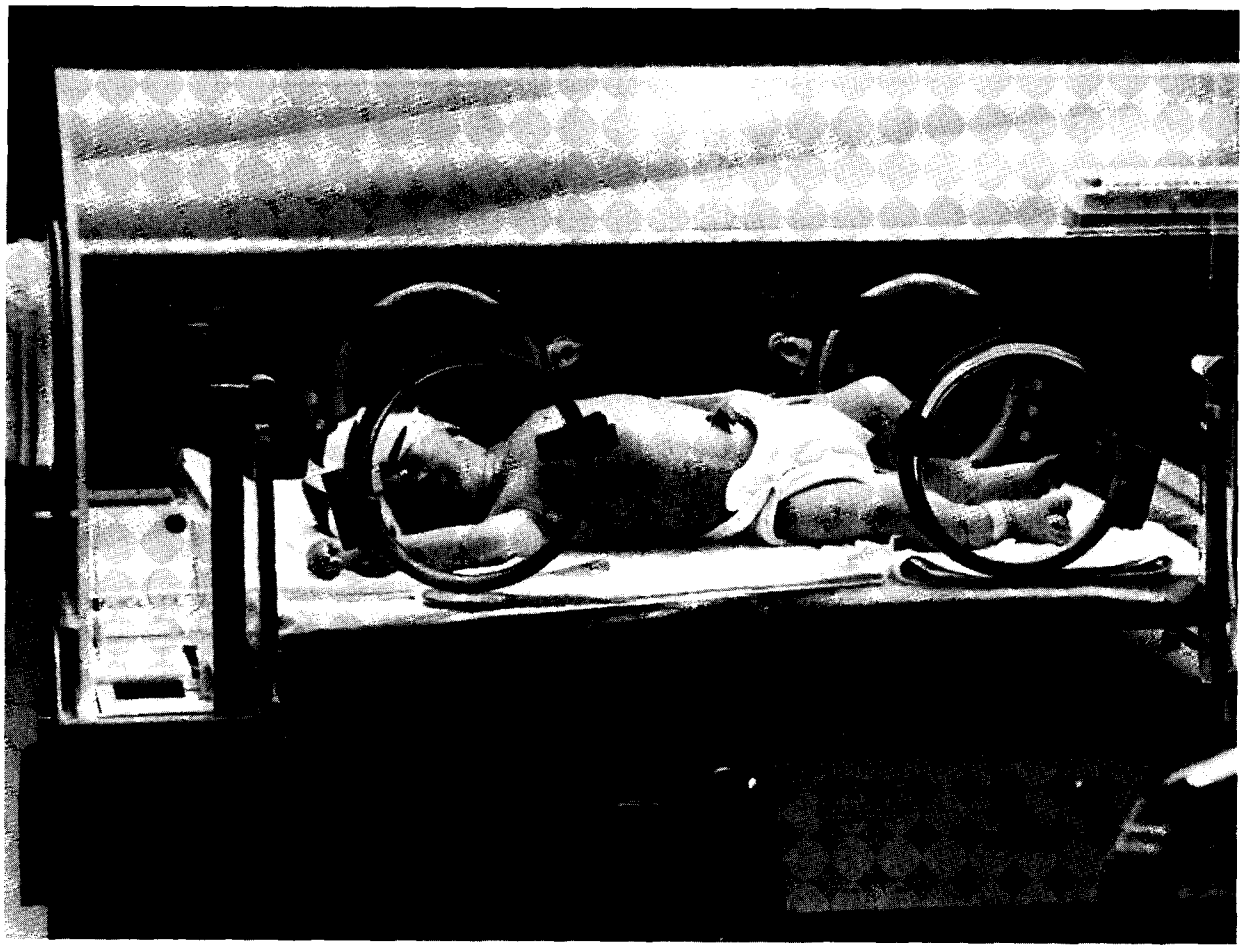

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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CORRESPONDENCE

First things

To the editors:

I applaud Kathleen M. Sullivan's exposition of the various "market failure" theories that dominate much of the academic discourse on First Amendment jurisprudence today ("The First Amendment Wars," September 28). I have one minor quibble, however. Sullivan recites at face value the argument that NEA grants "fund ... artists whose work is undervalued by the current market." This is a classic example of the way in which the arbitrary choice of a benchmark, in this case undervalued art that government funding saves from oblivion, determines an argument's outcome. The logic of funding undervalued art because the market fails to reward its creation can, in truth, be similarly employed to argue that such funding, in the context of scarce societal resources, amounts to state censorship of all the additional undervalued art the NEA chooses not to fund.

Surely NEA grants can be categorized as marketplace intervention in support of "cutting-edge" work. But the same phenomenon can also be characterized as a government mandate delineating what "cutting-edge" art consists of. Government funding of this sort may actually create the marketplace rather than merely subsidize it, and it may create it in such a fashion that funding rewards what the arts community deems avant-garde. Put differently, why does the use of tax dollars to support the art community's notion of avant-garde art necessarily enhance undervalued art? After all, the arts community simply turns around and funds exactly that art it values most highly.

My point is this: if "content restrictions in the funding context function as censorship by other means," as Sullivan states, then by the same logic funding grants are censorship as well. Once one relies on a market failure theory to justify enhancing certain speech, in this case "cutting-edge" art, any funding decision can be characterized as either censorship or sponsorship. Which is which is wholly a function of one's ideological assertions about what type of art, or speech, is meritorious.

SEAN MCAVOY
Shaker Heights, Ohio

To the editors:

Kathleen M. Sullivan discusses "our [First Amendment] faith," something that, in at least two respects, is of her article's own making.

It finds no reason for treating, as current law does, sexual speech differently from other speech. In 1986, in opposing anti-sodomy laws, which are mentioned in the article, four justices (including William Brennan) acknowledged a state's "undoubted power to punish [sex in public and] the public distribution of constitutionally unprotected, obscene material," and explained that "the same recognition that ["decisions concerning sexual relations" or "intimate behavior in intimate places"] are intensely private which justifies protecting them from government interference can justify protecting individuals from unwilling exposure to the sexual activities of others." According to this argument, consensual sexual activities are "intensely private," "intimate," and "personal," phrases also running through the recent *Casey* decision. If this is sufficient to define doctrine elsewhere in constitutional law, then why not First Amendment law?

Sizing up speech exercised in the government marketplace against speech in the private one, the article concludes that "content restrictions in the funding context" give government "significant leverage over speech in the aggregate" and "function as censorship," overruling current law. But a content restriction *reduces* a category of speech in the state's domain, only the cutting edge of which the article argues will not be "taken up" by the outside community, apparently causing the government's leverage to *decline*. The pragmatic reasoning about systemic effects does not determine when "leverage over speech in the aggregate" becomes constitutionally "significant," explain why the focus should be on the aggregate rather than on affected individual speakers, or distinguish between one content restriction or "cutting edge" and another.

LUIS DE LA TORRE
Washington, D.C.

Mixers

To the editors:

On his way to writing an article about intermarriage among races, Morton Kondracke began with some gratuitous shots at National Public Radio (Washington Diarist, "Blenders," September 21).

Kondracke is welcome to his opinions about NPR, but please permit me to straighten out some of the twists and turns of his argument. First, he simply invents a quote from me saying I am opposed to the American melting pot and somehow favor what he describes as an anti-assimilation approach in Canada. These are Kondracke's own biases speak-

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—SIMON SCHAMA, *The New Republic*

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ing; in our brief conversation he was the one who raised the issue of Canada. Kondracke wanted me to say (and made up his own quote when I did not say) that I endorse separate "multicultural" groupings in society, rather than the melting pot. That is not true.

What I said and what I believe is that the need to understand diversity in this country has never been greater. National Public Radio has reported extensively on racial and ethnic issues because this important aspect of our society needs to be discussed more fully and factually. I further said and believe that the strength of NPR News and its recent audience growth (to more than 9 million listeners each week) stem in part from the diversity of its staff. With about a third minority and half female employees, the NPR News staff is more representative of this nation and its future than most other networks, newspapers, or magazines.

WILLIAM E. BUZENBERG
Vice President
NPR News and Information
Washington, D.C.

Morton Kondracke replies:
I don't make up quotes. Mr. Buzenberg said what he said, and I quoted him correctly.

Deceleration

To the editors:
In *Two Cultures*, C. P. Snow remarked that:

> A good many times I have been present at gatherings of people who, by standards of traditional culture, are thought highly educated and who have with considerable gusto been expressing their incredulity at the illiteracy of scientists. Once or twice I have been provoked and have asked the company how many of them could describe the second law of thermodynamics. The response was cold; it was also negative.

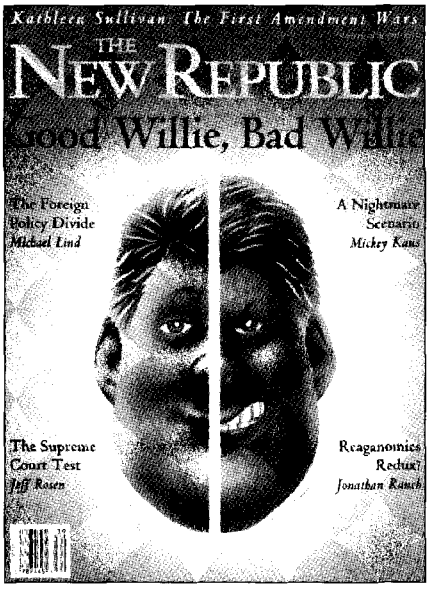
Sidney Blumenthal would have been welcome in such company, as he has apparently confused the second law of thermodynamics with Newton's third law of motion (for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction) in his essay on the Bush campaign ("Going Native," September 28). Nonetheless, reference to the second law of thermodynamics, which states that entropy (a measure of disorder) always increases, would have been appropriate. James Baker's arrival notwithstanding, it does appear that the Bush campaign is approaching entropic doom.

Perhaps even more apt, however, would be a transliteration to politics of Newton's second law: force is equivalent to mass times acceleration. As noted by Blumenthal, Bush has apparently been accelerating his efforts in recent days. Unfortunately for him, a lack of substance deprives his campaign of any real force.

ALAN B. WEDER, M.D.
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Instinctual recoil

To the editors:
I'm surprised that Andrew Sullivan, in his Provincetown Diarist ("Disappointed," September 28), brushes off a post-Houston fear he senses in the gay community. To dismiss this fear simply as "an inability to give up the subcultural identity" is callow. I too was terrified by what I heard at the GOP convention. Prime-time homophobia coming from preachers and politicians fuesl the dual engines of anti-gay violence and gay teen suicides, both currently at record levels and climbing. Thankfully Bush/Quayle/Robertson-style family values proved to be a bust and helped to splinter further an already fractious Republican electoral coalition. This was not evident until several weeks post convention, so please forgive us our fears, Mr. Sullivan. Disfranchised groups have good historical reason to mistrust the majority, especially in troubled economic times.



Having survived family values and celebrating its impotency as a campaign issue, a lingering fear persists. Yes "an instinctual recoil to victimology" has surfaced, but it is confined to the self-styled, self-aggrandizing "radical" gays. They are a distinct yet vocal minority. What I hear from the community is a best of times/worst of times scenario. Many expect Clinton to win and follow through on his promise of civil rights and AIDS funding. The worst of times will be the backlash: the increase in frequency and viciousness of anti-gay violence. Fundamentalists have declared war; gay rights in the '90s will be what abortion was in the '80s. The key difference is only a handful of anti-abortionists were violent, while fag-bashing is already a national pastime accruing more aficionados daily. The fear is a very personal one.

CHARLES FRANCHINO
New York, New York

Liberal evolution

To the editors:
I never thought I would find a liberal editor who could grasp the relevance of the genetic determinants of behavior ("Missing Link," October 5). It is heartwarming to find one of the finest liberal sources providing its readers with a sophisticated orientation.

If we liberals are to develop effective programs to maximize humane and egalitarian practices, we have to face the fact that we are an evolved species, unique, but with all of the genetic trappings that predispose us to behave in the best interests of ourselves and our most promising offspring. These predispositions know no color, sex, or social lines. But they do exist, and it is irresponsible to deny their role in our social behavior. It is also naive to believe that genetic predispositions can not be significantly modified. The task of liberals is to find ways to exploit our knowledge of the role of environment in modifying our tendencies to be shortsighted, opportunistic, and selfish. To let our values blind us to the facts of natural selection is indefensible.

RAY H. BIXLER
Louisville, Kentucky

Bay City Roller

To the editors:
I grew up in the '70s, too, and always thought Led Zep sang, "... it's just a *spring clean* for the May Queen"??? ("Rhinophilia" by Tad Friend, August 17). And I still don't know what Steve Miller sings in "The Joker": "Some people call me Maurice, cause I sing of the ??? love." Can you help?

Your Kung Fu Fightin' friend,
GREG WADDELL
Alexandria, Virginia

The editors welcome correspondence from readers. Letters should include the writer's full name, address, and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be held to under 200 words. Letters may be edited for space. Please address letters to: Correspondence, TNR, 1220 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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FROM WASHINGTON

Cheap shots

A vaccine against measles has been available since 1963. By the early 1980s the disease was practically wiped out in the United States. But since 1989 we've suffered a measles epidemic: more than 70,000 cases and 100 deaths. Half the deaths were of young children, and the cause was their failure to be vaccinated. The epidemic is waning, but measles and other preventable childhood diseases will return as long as kids don't get their shots.

Less than half of all inner-city children get the vaccinations recommended for them by their second birthday, according to a government study. In polio vaccinations of 1-year-olds, the United States ranks seventeenth in the world, behind places like Albania, China, Pakistan, Mexico, and Poland. (By school age, almost all American kids have had their shots; the problem is preschoolers.)

On the campaign trail, George Bush has been mocking Bill Clinton's notion of government spending as an investment. But childhood vaccination clearly is a social investment—not just in the goody-goody sense that nobody wants innocent children to die of measles, or even in the sense that shots are a health care bargain compared with the price of treating the disease. Vaccination is a social investment in the hard-nosed sense that immunization of individuals prevents the disease from spreading, and therefore benefits all of us in a very practical way. And yet, like so many other social investments, our vaccination infrastructure has been crumbling. And children are actually dying as a result.

Well, let's not get too Dickensian about this. The reason kids aren't getting their shots is not a simple matter of evil Republicans who would rather see innocent children die than pay more taxes. But it's reasonable to hope that this is one social problem we won't have for long if Bill Clinton is elected president next month.

The vaccination scandal has a variety of causes. The price of vaccines has skyrocketed—part of the larger health-care cost explosion. A dose of measles-mumps-rubella vaccine that cost $2.71 in 1980 is more than $15 today. (And the lawyers can't be blamed for this one. The government adopted a no-fault liability program for childhood vaccines in 1986.) Meanwhile, fewer families have employer-supplied health insurance, and fewer insurance plans cover vaccinations. Along with the growth of childhood poverty, this has put increased pressure on community health centers and public health clinics, whose budgets have not kept up during the Reagan-Bush years.

So children dying needlessly of preventable diseases is just another small aspect of the general decline of national well-being that snuck up on us while we were partying in the 1980s. That general decline will not be reversed overnight. But swift and fairly modest government action could reverse this one little aspect of that decline.

And so the vaccine scandal is characteristic of the Reagan-Bush years in a second way: the leaders of our government have no faith in the power of government to do good. They actually believe their own rhetoric about government not being the answer and not throwing money at problems, etc., etc., etc. They don't believe it is enough to seriously prune entitlements for the comfortable middle class. But that's the result of cynicism, not faith. They do believe their rhetoric enough to sit on their hands when a new social problem cries out for action.

The history of the Bush administration response to the childhood vaccination crisis will seem familiar to students of Bush's approach to other problems. As with the S&Ls, as with the deficit, as with Saddam Hussein, there were people—in government and out—who saw the problem coming and issued warnings at a time when it could have been solved at a lower cost. As with health care reform and parental leave, Bush's own proposals have only come in response to goading from the Democrats. As with drugs, Bush's approach has featured occasional public relations frenzies alternating with periods of calm.

In his first budget (fiscal 1990), Bush actually proposed a small cut in child immunization funds, from $142 million to $138 million. After Congress got through, the figure was $158 million. The next year Bush tried for another cut, to $152 million, but Congress insisted on an increase to $217 million. The next year Bush saw the light and proposed $257 million; Congress appropriated $297 million. For fiscal '93, with the election approaching, Bush bid $349 million and Congress actually sliced that by a few million (because Bush wanted to take the money from other programs, such as low-income heating assistance).

In June 1991 the president staged a Rose Garden ceremony, importing an audience of children for the occasion, to declare his commitment to childhood vaccination. He announced he was sending "SWAT teams" to six cities to study the problem. This was odd, since his own Department of Health and Human Services had just sent him a report analyzing the problem and proposing a $90 million emergency solution to it. Bush decided against that. In fact, at the time of the ceremony Bush was proposing to spend less on vaccinations than both houses of Congress had already cleared.

Eleven months later, last May, Bush was back in the Rose Garden announcing a new nationwide campaign for immunizing 2-year-olds. This is more than three years into his term and about as long into the measles epidemic.

I don't begin to know what is the "right" amount our government should be spending on child vaccinations. (The American Academy of Pediatrics says it's $487 million—a suspiciously exact figure.) And I don't pretend to suppose that throwing money at the problem is the entire answer. But I do feel, as a citizen of the richest country in the world, that this is a problem I shouldn't have to worry about. And I wish we had a president who would take whatever action, and spend whatever money, is necessary to solve it. Quickly, not after years of prodding. Perhaps that makes me a Democrat.

Is there anyone who thinks that poor kids shouldn't get vaccinated? Is there anyone sick and tired of seeing his tax dollars go to wasteful, overpaid bureaucrats who fritter away their days inoculating children against disease? Is there anyone who believes this is a matter best left to the private sector? That tax cuts can take care of it? That "a thousand points of light" will shine it away? That giving shots to 2-year-olds only encourages welfare dependency? That young children are a "special interest"? That preventing the spread of measles and polio is "social engineering" reflecting "European models" learned at places like Oxford?

Let those people vote for George Bush.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

OCTOBER 26, 1992

CRUNCH

It's incumbent upon responsible journals around now to warn about the "real issues," bemoan the superficiality of debate, demand that the candidates rise above petty politics to address the great needs of the nation. Occasionally this pose of seriousness may actually do something to nudge a sensible change of government policy. On the deficit, it seems to have become merely a comfortable part of national denial. There is almost a ritual about it: candidates avow an intent to tackle the problem; the press argues it's not enough; the candidates worry about recession; the voters reward the least courageous candidate. Four years and a couple of trillion dollars later, the press cranks out the high-mindedness one more time.

This year the likely winner, Bill Clinton, will play the role of Ronald Reagan in 1984 and George Bush in 1988. We don't mean to let Bush off the hook: his proposals add up to $166 billion in tax breaks and only $132 billion in spending cuts. But Clinton's ambitious economic proposals represent fiscal wishful thinking matched in recent years only by Reagan (see "Supply-side Democrat," TNR, September 28). Ironically, Clinton's campaign lead is strengthened by the tenacity of the current recession, which is prolonged precisely by the deficit Clinton will exacerbate. Any country that allows this kind of economic-political cycle to continue for long will soon find itself pauperized. And as John B. Judis points out this week (see "The Red Menace," page 26), the crisis may be even graver than we currently imagine.

For the record, here are some of the less alarming data about the scope of the problem. According to the Congressional Budget Office, under current policies our national debt will more than double in the next ten years and will total around 65.6 percent of GDP, up from 51 percent today. There's no easy cure: even with a decent amount of economic growth, the annual deficit will remain lodged at some 5 percent of GDP. All the while, interest payments will consume an ever greater share of government spending. This kind of debt is a threat in good times; if the world economy falters over the next decade—as it very well may—it could precipitate a global financial and economic crisis, in which the dollar loses its status as the leading international currency.

The fashionable argument of the moment is that a recession is the last moment to deflate an economy. Sure. But if we don't confront our fundamental economic problem in bad economic times, what hope is there that we'll do it in a recovery? What we need are a binding commitment now to enact tax hikes and entitlement cuts as soon as the upturn comes in earnest; and the determination to stick to the program. We suspect Bill Clinton knows this; we certainly hope Bill Clinton knows this. In our wildest dreams, we fantasize he's planning a blitzkrieg on our debt addiction, on the Nixon-China model, while pandering his way to the White House.

Our wish list for deficit reduction is a familiar one by now, although it exceeds Ross Perot's both in its scale and in its commitment to tax progressivity. It would include a phased fifty-cent-a-gallon gas tax to bring our energy costs back to reality; full means-testing of Social Security and Medicare benefits; a phased end to tax deductions on mortgages; some increase in tax rates for the very wealthy; and a simple elimination of agricultural subsidies. These measures would be phased in to coincide with an economic recovery over the next five years and should be presented as an early response to what should be described as a fiscal emergency. They would, to be sure, mean a real assault on middle- and upper-income entitlements; and they would be politically treacherous. But a new administration and a new Congress next year will mark our last chance to tackle the deficit before it fatally tackles the country.

In today's campaign, our plan sounds draconian. But our draconianism is based on the belief that, with our current social problems, our government has a duty to be more than solvent. It has a responsibility to turn the cycle of indebtedness and decay into a cycle of savings and investment, to turn the culture of entitlements into a culture of responsibility. According to Bill Clinton's rhetoric, that is his hope as well. If he does not confront the deficit, hope is all it will ever be. •

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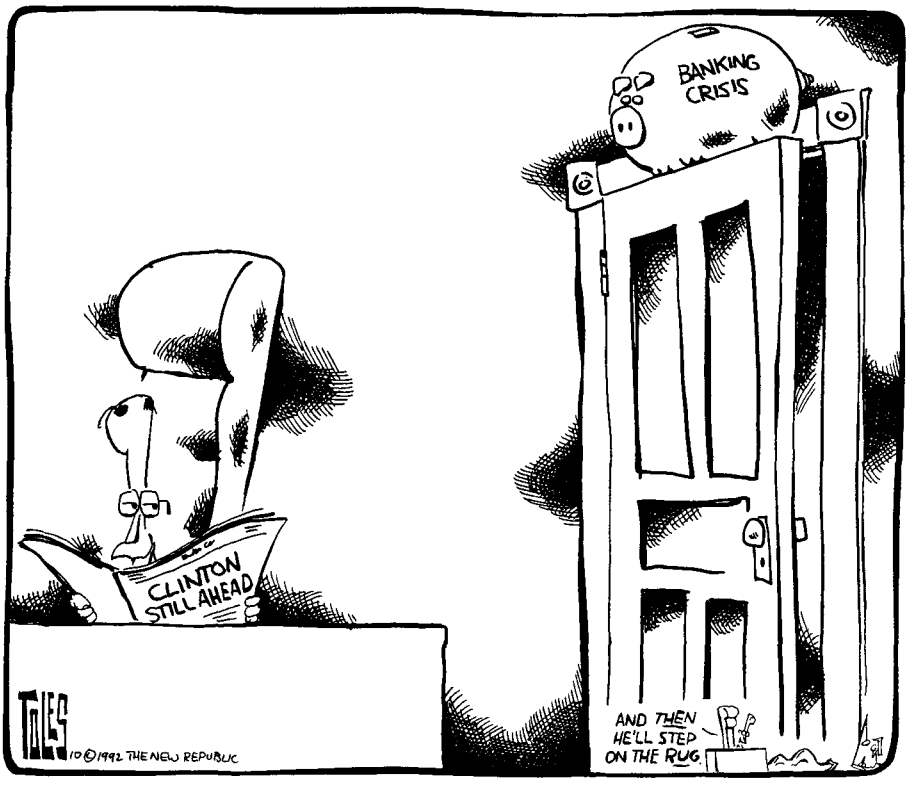
NOTEBOOK

BUSHISM OF THE WEEK: "The media has been rolling down the tracks in their own inimitable way and it's not been very pleasant, and the campaigning and stuff is not very much fun." —October 5, in Dover, Delaware

CLINTON-GORE SUCK-UP WATCH I: To the editor of *The Wall Street Journal*: "I read with astonishment your double-barreled assault (Sept. 9 in the news section, Sept. 10 on the editorial page) on one of Bill Clinton's friends and advisers, Derek Shearer, which portrayed Mr. Shearer as a sort of crazy, wild-eyed left-wing lunatic throwback to some earlier era. The era that comes to mind in this case, of course, is the era of McCarthy—Joe, that is, not Eugene. In fact, the articles on Derek Shearer were absurd. First, through blind quotes and innuendo, the articles suggest that Mr. Shearer's views are somehow 'socialist,' even un-American. Gov. Clinton is then condemned by association with Mr. Shearer's alleged views. Of course, both halves of this equation are equally unfair. Mr. Shearer's views are grossly misrepresented; and Gov. Clinton, in any case, surely no more subscribes to all of those views than he would to the views of any other single adviser or friend." —Richard Holbrooke, managing director, Lehman Brothers



CLINTON-GORE SUCK-UP WATCH II: "As his motorcade sped through leafy Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, in late September, Al Gore leaned against his orthopedic back pillow, drank bottled water, and reflected upon the human spirit and his newfound sense of self. How is it that the wooden-tongued policy wonk of 1988 has emerged as an introspective spokesman for the inner child, an icon for the new manhood?" —reporter Elizabeth Taylor, *Time*, October 12

THE NEW NATIONAL COMMISSION ON ANYTHING: The above-mentioned Richard Holbrooke, former secretary of state for East Asian affairs, has been chosen to head a new bipartisan commission. Joining him are twenty-three distinguished former something or others, with a combined total of 432 years of government service behind them, including Harvard government professor Graham Allison, Democratic foreign policy hands Madeleine Albright and Stuart Eizenstat, as well as former ambassadors Stephen Bosworth and Winston Lord, a few ex-Reaganites Admiral William Crowe, Frank Carlucci, and Bobby Ray Inman. Readers are invited to guess whether this is: A) An Atlantic Institute panel on NATO in the '90s; B) A blue-ribbon presidential commission on downsizing defense; C) A joint Carnegie Endowment–Institute for International Economics panel on organizing the U.S. government after the cold war; D) An Aspen Institute forum on Maastricht and the American economy; or E) A Council on Foreign Relations study group on hemispheric relations. See the end of the Notebook for the answer.

POPE ON A ROPE: On "Saturday Night Live" last week viewers watched pop singer Sinead O'Connor finish her act with the line, "We have confidence in the victory of good over evil," produce a color picture of the pope, and begin tearing it up, with the words "Fight the real enemy." The network was not warned of the act, nor should it be held responsible for the star's unprompted action. But it's another interesting example of the new acceptability of anti-Catholic bigotry on the left, which seeks not to debate the Church's public positions but to vilify the symbols of Catholicism. Act-Up pioneered this hatred; some pro-choice groups have sustained it; O'Connor represents its debut on national television. No doubt Time Warner will soon be signing a contract.

PRELUDE TO A RAID: Shortly before the invasion of Panama, George Bush swore, "There's no vendetta

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against the Panamanian Defense Forces as an institution," just their leader. Then, in the prelude to war in the Gulf, he said, "Let me also make clear that the United States has no quarrel with the Iraqi people. Our quarrel is with Iraq's dictator." Now Bush is turning his attention to domestic affairs. He recently announced: "My argument is not with the people of Arkansas," but with their governor. Let's hope Little Rock is well-equipped with bomb shelters.

HOOPS: HIV-infected basketball star Magic Johnson recently resigned from the National Commission on AIDS, to which President Bush appointed him last November 15. "Bush wasn't doing anything, and he's made that statement clear by not giving any money or anything," Johnson said in a huff. Speaking of not doing anything, Johnson had managed to attend his first commission meeting two months after his assignment, and had made only one meeting out of a possible five.

Answer: C) A joint Carnegie Endowment–Institute for International Economics panel on organizing the U.S. government in the post-cold war era.

THE SHRUB FILE

FRIED CHICKEN

By Douglas G. McGrath

Tuesday, September 29, 1992

This sure isn't like the '88 campaign when everything the Shrub did went his way. Nothing's working now, and he's cracking under the pressure. Today he got into a fight with a chicken.

Of course, I'm referring to a man in a chicken suit, sent by the Clinton people to needle the Shrub about not debating. Although there's been one at every stop, this time the Shrub snapped. He turned to the chicken and said, "Are you that chicken out there that went over there to that marvelous Oxford boutique over there across that ocean out there as you, as you, as you—128 tax hikes, don't anybody forget that—getting a degree in *the peace sign* with that John Lennon-Oscar Wilde crowd, wearing American flag underwear or some kind of crazy anti-us thing as you, as you, as you, while you ducked your duties in Vietnam-de-plume?" The chicken yelled, "Why won't you debate? Coward!"

Well, we knew there was going to be trouble. The Shrub goes ballistic whenever anyone challenges his manhood. Before Agent Banks and I could stop him, he jumped over the back of the train and started chasing the chicken. "No chicken is going to challenge the dignity of the president of the United States and get away with it!"

They rolled around, but the chicken pinned the Shrub down. Banks and I tried to pull him off, but he was one tough bird. I called for back-up, announcing an M-11. (An M-11 means "The president is having difficulty with the annual Thanksgiving turkey on the front lawn." It wasn't exactly correct, but it's the only poultry-alert signal the Secret Service has.)

Agent Diggins was inside the train with Mrs. Shrub, who was having her shoulders waxed. Diggins said that when Mrs. Shrub heard we needed help bringing in a 160-pound chicken, she jumped off the table and rushed to the window. "A 160-pound chicken!" she said, her hand trembling as she jerked up the shade. "That must be almost eighty buckets worth!"

On our way to the next stop, Crisco lit into the Shrub. Said this was worse than running Ford's re-election, and he never thought he'd say that about anything. "Bad enough that Danny has a feud going with a fictional T.V. character. You've got to pick a fight with a fake chicken!" The Shrub sat glumly in his chair, tossing pencils at his portable bust of Martin Van Buren.

Crisco snapped, "Do you know how many leaks it's going to take to distance me from this? Wiley-poo!" he said to Mrs. Tutwiler, who was lying prone at his feet. "Start calling people right away. Tell them Skinner told the president to attack if he was ever heckled by a chicken." Mrs. Tutwiler said softly, "Assaulting animals sounds more like Sununu." Crisco ruffled her hair, "Good, girl, Magsie! Get it out."

Mr. Teeter said, "We *do* have some poll numbers that show the president gaining among some voters."

The Shrub brightened. "Tell me, Teet-head!"

"We've found you have strong appeal among men married to bigger women, the 'Jack Sprats.' And you have an insurmountable lead among voters who can't remember if they've used the verb in the sentence yet."

Crisco said that wasn't enough and that if the Shrub couldn't turn this chicken bit around by the evening news, they would have no option but to debate Clinton.

So the Shrub met the press a few minutes later. He tried to look relaxed, which always makes everyone nervous. He said, "There are those out there who would like me to get my hair colored up and dance around in a miniskirt—show people I'm all jazzy—and drop some one-liners to bring in the votes. But I and Bar and I respect that house too much—*and not just because it's white*—to undignify it. *Been a weird year.* Not my fault, but—I mean, look, lookie here. Weird enough when a president is challenged within his own party by some smart-alecky columnist during the primaries, and even weirder when he has to catch spears from an Elvis-loving draft dodger, but when people dressed as poultry start attacking the highest elected official in the land, well, to quote me: I, I—what was I saying?—I mean, that means, that shows, that just goes to show—jot it down this way: the smoke is blowing and the bluefish are frenzying. Y'know what I mean?" The reporters were just staring at him, slack-jawed.

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The Shrub smiled at somebody—"Hey Stevarino!"—and mimed shooting a gun at him. "I mean, even with that chicken out there who, who—I'll tell you, I mean, who, look, who, *no sugar-coater me: We're talking about a big bird.* And I'll tell you things were looking pretty bleak under the rubber foot of that chicken."

But then the terrible thing happened. His face creased up, his features drawing in toward his nose. He clutched his throat. I thought he was dying. I looked at Banks like: Should we get him out of here? But then he coughed, there was a weird pause as everyone leaned forward, and a little yellow feather flew out.

Needless to say, he's going to debate.

DOUGLAS G. MCGRATH is a New York writer.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

CHURCHILL SYNDROME

By Fred Barnes

President Bush is bewildered. "I mean, do you remember Desert Storm?" he asked on October 5 on CNN's "Larry King Live." "If you listen to the debate these days, it has been like it never existed." Victory in the cold war is also forgotten. "Listen to the media and these talking heads and you listen to the opponents, you'd think that world peace doesn't mean anything," Bush complained to a labor union gathering in Newark, New Jersey, on September 30. And the absence of an imminent nuclear threat? "You'd think it wouldn't matter at all if you listened to the debate on the other side," Bush added in Newark.

Unbeknownst to Bush, there's an explanation for all this. The media and Bill Clinton, though hostile to Bush and intent on marginalizing his issues, aren't it. At work instead is the Churchill effect, the tendency of voters to tune out wartime leaders once the war's over. In 1945 the British election was held eleven weeks after World War II ended in Europe. The Labour Party had clear plans for domestic change, outlining a five-year program of economic and social reform. Churchill and the Tories dwelled less on domestic concerns and were vague about their plans. They didn't adjust to the postwar world soon enough, and lost in a landslide.

Bush hasn't adjusted fully either. He's running for reelection as president, but he's really got his heart on a second term as commander in chief. Thus the cold war, nukes, Desert Storm, and the military are very much on his mind. His constant companion on the stump is Gerald McRaney, the actor who plays Major Dad, a Marine, on a T.V. sitcom. McRaney never served in the military. ("When I tried to join, I was married and had a kid and they turned me down," he told reporters.) But Bush treats him like a war hero. In Clearwater, Florida, on October 3, Bush made an announcement "in honor of the Major's presence." He spelled out plans for keeping active nearby MacDill Air Force, which "played a big role in bringing an end to the cold war and certainly in Desert Storm."

In stump speeches, Bush insists that his own military experience makes him suitable for commander in chief. And he mocks the idea of Clinton as commander in chief. "I am very proud that I served my country in the uniform of the United States of America," he declared in Nashville on September 29. "I hope it has made me a better commander in chief. And I hope it made me a sensitive one, because the toughest decision that a president has to make is to commit somebody else's son or daughter into combat." Not only was Clinton not in the military, he took "a principled stand on both sides of the Gulf war," backing the use of force and a continued sanctions-only policy, Bush said in Blountsville, Tennessee. "Now, how would that be for a commander in chief when you've got to stand up against aggression halfway around the world?"

Bush has a legitimate point. The trouble is, it's one that most voters don't care about. They have moved on to other anxieties. Bush is particularly pained by the fading of Desert Storm. "Governor Clinton wants us to forget that we have changed the world," Bush said in Alcoa, Tennessee, on September 29. "And I am not going to let him forget that the young men and women that fought in Desert Storm helped us change the world and make it more peaceful for every young person here today." Of course, making Clinton remember isn't the point. Making the voters care about Desert Storm is.

To overcome the Churchill effect, Bush first had to recognize the phenomenon and take it seriously. But practically no one in the White House or campaign (except Jim Pinkerton and Bill Kristol) did. Second, he needed to devote himself to domestic issues. Last November he was urged to call Congress back into session to pass an anti-recession package. Bush declined, and he's been drifting downward ever since. At some point, perhaps last spring, voters dropped him from their scope, sensing intuitively that he's a wartime president in a postwar world.

He missed opportunities to take the lead domestically. Example: a plan, sure to be popular, to cut auto insurance rates by 25 percent to 30 percent. Michael Horowitz, a former Reagan official, and law professor Jeff O'Connell briefed White House aides on such a plan in April 1991. (It would allow drivers to give up the right to sue for "pain and suffering" in auto accidents.) Three aides jumped on the idea and briefed Cabinet members, but they couldn't get senior White House officials, much less Bush, to sign on. The plan languished until James Baker took over the White House staff. Now Bush may propose it, but too late to get much political benefit.

Two poll findings, both from surveys by the Bush cam-

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Chelsea Three Years Later

BY ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

There's an old saying that every educational experiment is doomed to succeed. In fact, many are pronounced successes before they even get started.

A few weeks ago, I talked about the "Breaking-the-Mold" award for successful educational innovation that Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander bestowed on Educational Alternatives, Inc. (EAI). That's the private, for-profit company that is going to run nine Baltimore schools for the next five years. Some of EAI's ideas sound interesting, and maybe the outfit will do great things. The trouble is, Secretary Alexander gave them the award after they'd been on the job for only two days.

This is not unusual. Many people claim success in advance for their educational schemes — particularly those who ride in on a white horse to show the ordinary teachers and administrators how schools should be run. This kind of easy attitude toward making claims is unfortunate because it gives everybody the wrong idea about what's involved in improving our schools. It also dishonors the people who are engaged in the day-to-day business of making schools work. And when the miraculous claims turn out to be much exaggerated or altogether without basis, some people become disillusioned and others cynical about the possibility of any change for the better in education.

We should put a ban on claiming miracles for programs that are nothing more than plans.

Recently, I was at a *Fortune* magazine education summit where I saw John Silber, the president of Boston University. Silber was responsible for Boston University's takeover of the Chelsea school district nearly three years ago. Chelsea is an impoverished district across the river from Boston. In 1989, the Chelsea schools were failing by every measure. They had the highest dropout rate and about the lowest test scores in the state. Silber said that if he could just do things his way in the Chelsea schools, he would bring about miraculous changes. Indeed, he called Chelsea "a crucible of the American dream."

What kind of results did Silber promise? He said, among other things, that by the end of the fifth year of the takeover, average test scores for third graders in math and reading would be at the statewide average; average test scores for students who were with the new system for five years would be "dramatically above the statewide average"; the dropout rate would have declined from an annual rate of 15 percent to well below 10 percent; average daily attendance would be above 90 percent; and teacher absenteeism would decline by an average of 20 percent. ("Boston University's Report on the Chelsea Public Schools: A Model for Excellence in Urban Education," 1988, chapter 3.)

We are now near the end of the third year of BU's stewardship of Chelsea's schools, and there are signs of trouble in the enterprise. For example, Chelsea has its third superintendent in three years, which is probably a record even among unsuccessful urban districts. Moreover, the interim report of the Chelsea project shows that there has been little measurable progress and some things are actually worse. The dropout rate is the same as it was when BU took over; the student attendance rate is unchanged at 81 percent; and teacher attendance is down. Test scores for third graders rose slightly between 1989 and 1991, but scores for students in the sixth and ninth grades fell. And after improving in the first two years, SAT scores are now 44 points below what they were when BU took over. (Report to the [Mass.] Legislature, "The Boston University/Chelsea Partnership," Sept. 1, 1992.) Of course, the five years that comprise this part of the experiment are not over, but very few reasonable people would say that the results Silber promised are likely to be attained in the two years that remain.

When ordinary school people who are trying to improve their schools say they need more money, they rarely get much sympathy. "Public schools are always calling for more money" is what they hear. But to what does John Silber attribute his lack of success? For one thing, the lack of money.

When ordinary school people who are trying to improve their schools insist that test scores and statistics are not the whole story, they are accused of trying to avoid accountability. And their invitation to come into the school and see "a lot of good things happening" — teachers smiling, students engaged in learning and the like — is likely to be met with a sneer. So what does BU's report on Chelsea say? It says that, despite what the statistics indicate, a lot of good things are happening. As Silber puts it, "Somebody ought to go into the classroom and look at what's going on and see the excitement in these kids."

It's interesting that after all the hoopla about how Chelsea was going to "provide a model of school reform across the nation" and after the project has failed to deliver on its promises, John Silber is still looked on as some kind of education guru. Would a business person who had promised amazing results but didn't deliver still be listened to respectfully three years later?

We should put a ban on claiming miracles for programs that are nothing more than plans. Doing so is like claiming a cure for cancer or the common cold because you've come up with an idea that you'd like to try. We should honor people who recognize the difficulty of what they are doing and have humility about the prospects of success. But those who over-claim and give phony promises of success in advance should be treated like the hucksters they are.

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paign, show the dimensions of Bush's Churchill problem. One deals with the issues Bush cited in his September 12 speech offering a second-term agenda. By a sizable margin, voters preferred Bush's positions (lower taxes, spending cuts, legal reform, school choice) to Clinton's. But when Bush's name was attached to the agenda, support plummeted. The Bush agenda lost by a 2-to-1 margin, voters figuring that anything domestic that Bush advocates won't happen. The second also involves Bush's lack of credibility. Since September 12, despite T.V. ads and Bush's own repetition of his message, only 2 percent more voters believe Bush has a credible plan for the economy.

Bush will be the last person to get wind of this. "Campaigning is going very well," says a senior aide. "When you're on the road, it feels good. The energy level is high. There's lots of enthusiasm. The president gets raucous greetings everywhere." When 20,000 people showed up to see him in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, on September 30, Bush was thrilled. In Orlando, Florida, three days later he boasted: "I'll tell you why I'm going to win the election." He gave three reasons, and was wrong on at least two of them. "We've got a better [economic and domestic] plan," he said. Fine, but nobody's paying attention to it. "Secondly, the young people in America go to bed at night without that same fear of nuclear war the generations ahead of them had." True, but this is a reason it's less risky to vote for a callow youth like Clinton. Finally, voters will ask whom they trust with the "dignity, prestige, and the enormous power" of the presidency. As it stands, they trust Clinton sufficiently. This leaves Bush with the task of making Clinton seem untrustworthy, just as another Tory prime minister, John Major, did with his Labour foe, Neil Kinnock, in last April's British election. My guess is that Bush will go the way of Churchill instead. •

Sarajevo's siege paper.

DEADLINE

By Anna Husarska

SARAJEVO

In many places here one has to run for fear that the Serb snipers will shoot. In some, one has to run because one *knows* the snipers will shoot. The entrance to the local newspaper, *Oslobodenje* (Liberation), is one such place.

The Serbs who are besieging Sarajevo hate everything about this newspaper. *Oslobodenje* is the only staple produced here daily (even bread is sometimes missing). It maintains high spirits among the population and, more importantly, it gives the lie to Greater Serbian propaganda about the impossibility of the three ethnic groups—Serbs, Croats, and Muslims—living together in peace. Just as in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole, at the newspaper a third of the staff is Serb. The editor in chief, Kemal Kurspahić, is a Muslim, but when he was hospitalized after a car accident, the acting editor was Gordana Knežević, a Serb.

Western Sarajevo, where the newspaper is located (on the way to the airport), is one of the city's fiercest combat zones. At the end of June, Serbian gunners fired incendiary shells at the twelve-story tower belonging to the publishing house Oslobodenje—which before this war produced sixty textbooks and twenty periodicals a year in addition to the newspaper—and gutted it almost entirely. Now journalists work in a two-story building adjacent to the tower, which is pretty much gutted itself. The printing is done in the basement. In late August five journalists were wounded when the building was hit by a dozen missiles.

Alas, both buildings are modern, glass-fronted edifices, so the snipers have an unobstructed view. The staff of *Oslobodenje* has hung posters and sheets over the windows and put upended desks against them to provide some protection, but the staff is far from secure. When I toured the offices with a photographer, Svetlana Anotić, she periodically warned me to duck, declaring either "big *opasno*" or "little *opasno*." (*Opasno* means "dangerous"—one of the first words I learned). I felt like a mouse scampering from one safe hole to another in a room full of nasty cats.

These journalists may sound like kamikazes, but they have some survival instinct. Those who can do so work from home and fax or dictate their texts. But most telephone lines inside the town are dead, so this can involve venturing out to a friend's home where the line still works. Some ten editors, the production personnel, and the printers work in shifts, and live in the building for a week at a time to minimize the risk of being shot at the entrance. Photographers have to appear daily with their film, and miraculously none has yet been killed by snipers (although one photojournalist died after being hit by a mortar shell as he took pictures for a story on the water shortages in town).

Avoiding enemy fire is psychologically exhausting, but it's not as bad as the work itself. Photographer Safet Gubelić told me: "I am a machine registering the dead people in the street, in the market, in the garden. After six months of this I am a wreck, I need a rest." But he cannot get out: only foreigners are allowed through the checkpoints by the Serbs who have circled Sarajevo.

The journalists' work is made particularly difficult by the lack of communication with the external world. They have only one fax line and two telephone lines. Ham-radio operators in Sarajevo, who have contact with those in Zagreb and other towns, serve as go-betweens for *Oslobodenje* and its correspondents in London, Moscow, Brussels, and New York. International news is also picked up from radio broadcasts by those who speak foreign languages. Safet speaks English, so when

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he is not taking photographs or attending press conferences given by the U.N. forces stationed here, he does some monitoring.

According to one of the editors, Branko Tomić, the biggest problem is the electricity needed for running the offset presses. The generator works on diesel, which is scarce now and will be even more so when it gets cold and the fuel is needed for heating. "In winter we will be ice people," he predicts matter-of-factly. In the basement, looking over the proofs of the next day's issue, the chief of this shift of printers, Sefket Terzić, was more concerned about newsprint: the paper has reduced its print run from 50,000 to 4,000 (the journalists themselves distribute the copies, which disappear from the makeshift stands in hours); the size was reduced from ten to twenty pages of broadsheet to four, with a weekly eight-page edition (the obituaries can take up three pages); the format of the pages is smaller too, since *Oslobodenje* now uses newsprint that was meant for children's books. But Tomić informed me that despite these measures, reserves will not last for more than a month. Muhamed Hrlović, who oversees the technical side of the printing, told me that a French organization (later I learned it was Reporters Sans Frontières) has donated forty tons of paper. It is said to be waiting in Split, on the Adriatic coast, but the Serbs will not let it go through, and the U.N. argues that it cannot transport it, since it is not, in the strictest sense, humanitarian aid.

Before the breakup, Yugoslavia was known for its high standard of typography, and Western countries often commissioned art books to be produced here. The computerized presses of *Oslobodenje* were among the most sophisticated in Europe. Terzić remembered an American cookbook printed here, but the orders were mostly for dictionaries and Bibles. Now they print *Oslobodenje* and *Večernje Novine,* Sarajevo's afternoon tabloid. The only book I saw lying around, about to be bound, was a report on concentration and extermination camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although truncated, *Oslobodenje* still looks like the high-quality daily it once was: professional, objective, well designed. The big difference is that now it deals almost exclusively with war: the counting of mortars that landed and people who were killed, the threat of epidemics, the humanitarian aid, the drama of the orphans, the overcrowded cemeteries, the uncertain news about water or electricity. International news is consumed by the mission of "Sajrus Vans," by the activities of the U.N., and by the peace conferences. Even the weather forecast is war-related, since the dropping temperatures and the advent of snow mean death in unheated and windowless apartments.

Nine years ago, in the autumn of 1983, Sarajevans were hoping that there would be plenty of snow: their city was hosting the Winter Games. At that time, *Sports Illustrated* wrote: "Meanwhile, the Sarajevo newspaper *Oslobodenje* was conducting an 'Olympic smile' promotion in which just about everybody in town—taxi drivers,

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waiters, store clerks—was rated for courtesy and friendliness, with the widest smilers getting praised in print." Nowadays in Sarajevo there are no taxis, only foreign journalists are served by waiters, I have not seen a single open store, and those who get praised in print by *Oslobodenje* are not the widest smilers, but the best soldiers. •

THE PRESS

SOUND-BITTEN

By Mickey Kaus

On September 17 the president of the United States traveled to Enid, Oklahoma (the "Bright Star of the Great Plains"), to deliver a speech. It was a fine demagogic effort, in the "campaign mode" George Bush employed so successfully in 1988. Back then, Bush had accused Michael Dukakis of coming from a "Harvard boutique." In Enid, Bush accused Bill Clinton of studying "social engineering" at "Oxford in the 1960s," adding: "From Santa Monica to Cambridge, my opponents are cranking up their models—ready to test them, on you." Bush's pseudo-populism was so alarming that my colleague Michael Kinsley devoted a whole TRB column to rebutting the speech.

But the most significant thing about Bush's Enid address was this: not a syllable of it made the evening news, at least not the network news shows. NBC simply ignored it. ABC showed a few seconds of Bush, without the sound track, while anchorman Peter Jennings paraphrased Bush's charge that Clinton favored a "European style welfare state." CBS devoted exactly ten seconds to Enid: another soundless picture, with Dan Rather offering a bland, generic paraphrase. "President Bush was campaigning for re-election in Oklahoma today. He attacked Bill Clinton's plan for the economy, claiming it would mean higher taxes for many family farmers and small business owners." End of Enid.

Bush no doubt expected better results. After all, he was playing by the rules of the "television campaign" that have governed presidential politics for almost a quarter century. The rules are simple and familiar. Campaigns, in Kiku Adatto's description ("The Incredible Shrinking Sound Bite," TNR, May 28, 1990), are "managed and orchestrated to play on the evening news." The idea is to present the networks each day with a compelling visual (e.g., Reagan at Normandy) and a succinct message ("sound bite"). Starting with Nixon in 1968, the successful candidates have been those who were disciplined, stuck to their sound bites, and didn't "step on their message" by making extraneous news. Candidates who strayed from this T.V.-imposed discipline lost—for example, Jack Kemp in 1988. That year also saw the triumph of the "negative" sound bite, as perfected by Bush and lamented by innumerable campaign-watchers.

What Bush seems to be discovering, in 1992, is that the venerable "television campaign" doesn't work anymore. Tired of being denounced at Kennedy School seminars, the networks have gotten their backs up. This was evident in 1988, but the networks' chosen strategy for handling the Bush/Dukakis race—show the staged "visuals" while offering self-conscious commentary about how staged they are—backfired. Polls showed the voters remembered the visuals and not the catty commentary. This year the networks have all adopted more effective tactics.

The week of the Enid speech (September 14 through 18) is as good a one as any to examine in closer detail. This was an unexceptional period in the 1992 campaign. By the beginning of the week, the news-eating hurricanes in Florida and Hawaii had died down. By the end, Ross Perot was just beginning to slink back onstage. Here is what viewers of each network saw:

NBC: The most traditional approach. Shows brief excerpts from several Bush speeches but swaddles them in correspondent John Cochran's anti-Bush commentary. On Monday Cochran shows Bush seeking votes in Oregon and Washington by pledging not to sign an extension of the Endangered Species Act. "It is time to make people more important than owls," says Bush. "Even owl-bashing might not win those two states," says Cochran. On Thursday, while ignoring the Enid speech, Cochran shows Bush claiming his plan would have meant "120,000 new housing starts." Cochran notes that "many economists" disagree. Plus polls show the voters "do not trust" Bush. "How do they manage a breakthrough ... in the Bush re-election campaign?" Tom Brokaw asks. "I don't know," Cochran answers. "He has defined himself so many times on economic issues, I don't see how he can do it again."

ABC: Opts for a two-tier strategy. Reports on the actual campaign are restricted to a few seconds at the beginning of each newscast; then viewers are treated to long, leaden pieces on "issues" or campaign strategy. On Monday Jennings spends a grand total of a minute and a half on what had actually happened in the campaign that day (Bush's anti-owl clip, with Clinton's response paraphrased). Then comes a much longer "Campaign Focus" segment on "targeting the message" in Texas. (It seems voters there are concerned about the economy.) On Tuesday there are five minutes on the "battle for the suburbs," with Jennings wandering around North Carolina like an alien explaining in tones of wonderment what a suburb is. ("Millions of Americans have been trying to make their way out of the cities to a place where they could mow the lawn ...") Wednesday brings long pieces on "the South" (where people are worried about the economy), on Southern blacks, on the people of Morganton, North Carolina (who are worried about the economy), plus a four-minute "American Agenda" segment on "jobs." The rest of the week features long pieces

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on "young voters," "Southern white males" (who worry about the economy), the deficit, and "white born-again Christians" (who worry a bit less about the economy). Some undecided voters vent their worries as a collective "Person of the Week." Missing completely on Thursday and Friday are the traditional clips of either Bush or Clinton delivering their messages. No new sound bites.

CBS: The most bizarre coverage, perhaps influenced by a command decision last fall not to broadcast bites of *under* thirty seconds. On Monday, after three commercial breaks, Susan Spencer reports on the owl controversy. But Tuesday's newscast opens with correspondent Mark Phillips visiting a Pittsburgh bowling alley and interviewing bowlers who say they don't understand the candidates' positions, wish the candidates would give more answers, but don't really listen to them anyway. ("It goes in one ear and out the other," says one "bowler-voter.") Phillips's revelation: "Nobody's been bowled over by the campaign thus far." On Wednesday there is one minute on the debates (with a thirty-second Clinton spiel), then a long piece about the race in hurricane-struck Florida. On Thursday Bush gets his soundless ten seconds in Enid, then comes a longer piece on Hollywood fund-raising. Friday is also bite-free. There is a piece on why Missouri is a battleground. (It's a "mirror on the nation.") Then twelve seconds reporting that Gore and Clinton campaigned on college campuses, then two minutes on how Bush is in trouble ("as he smiled his way through another campaign day today"). Perot alone gets a quick bite in, before another meandering Phillips piece that begins by revealing that polls have influence (!) and ends with a discussion of cutesy election predictors (hemlines, the quality of Bordeaux wines). Rather caps the week by spending almost five minutes in a Webster Grove, Missouri, living room talking to Typical Suburban Couples about the election. They are worried about the economy.

Poor Bush. He went into his "campaign mode" just when the networks decided not to cover the campaign. This may result in no great loss to the nation, but the demise of the "television campaign" is at least one reason why this year's presidential race has a strange, dead quality. When the campaign isn't covered, after all, it doesn't really happen. This is not an epistemological issue, but a practical one. There's simply no need for Candidate B to respond to Candidate A's accusation if the accusation is not disseminated. True, the flags and furloughs of 1988 were not all that enlightening. But there's also truth in the old argument that a politician's character comes out in the cut and thrust of campaign brawling. (Certainly Dukakis's did. Bush's too, when you think about it.) The things the networks have given us in place of the campaign—endless analyses and repetitive interviews with ordinary voters—don't illuminate the electorate's mindset so much as they threaten to embalm it. How can any candidate make a fresh point or change anyone's mind when newscasts are shaped almost entirely by elaborate celebrations of what the voters already think? It's enough to make you hunger for a nice, juicy sound bite. •

The Mastercard bandits.

CARD SHARKS

By James J. Cramer

Two years ago, when America's banking system stood on the verge of collapse, the government began what now appears to be a stunningly successful rescue mission. First, the regulators, responding to pressure from the administration, ceased their aggressive examinations, allowing banks to let their capital reserves build. Second, the Federal Reserve lowered short-term interest rates to 3 percent, the lowest in twenty-nine years. Third, banks of all sizes and states were allowed to merge, creating giants that could dominate whole markets efficiently and profitably.

The result? A sea of red ink turned black, so black that the FDIC now reports that commercial banks earned a record $7.9 billion in the second quarter this year. At the same time, the number of bad loans dropped below where it was before the crisis began. Bank stocks soared, allowing even badly managed banks to raise more equity, ensuring their survival even if the recession lingers or worsens. To be sure, there are more failures to come, but the brunt of the collapse is now well behind us.

What do America's taxpayers have to show for all this? Almost nothing. There is virtually no growth in the availability of credit. Banks, rather than making new loans, simply take in your deposits, pay you drastically lower rates, and reinvest the capital in medium-term Treasury bonds yielding between 5 percent and 7 percent. In other words, the banks are arbitraging passbook and checking account funds to make billions risk-free.

It's time for this bonanza to end. We can't force the banks to lend, and we don't want the Federal Reserve to raise short-term interest rates simply to eliminate their easy profits. But the administration can insist that banks cut rates for their largest class of borrowers, the 110 million people who currently owe $189 billion on their credit cards. These cards, which carry a stunning average rate of 18.2 percent—fully 15 percent above what it costs a bank to borrow—are depriving consumers of their ability to spend, at a time when the nation needs to get the economy moving again. If credit card interest rates were cut in half, to 9.1 percent, banks would still make a healthy profit, and consumers would save roughly $17 billion a year. That's a much more direct way of helping strapped consumers than any presidential candidate has suggested, and it represents the only non-budget-busting method the government has left to get the economy rolling.

So why hasn't it been suggested? Principally, because President Bush fears a repeat of what happened in

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November 1991, when he offhandedly mentioned that interest rates on cards were too high. Three days later, after Senator Alfonse D'Amato filed a bill to put Bush's words into law, the stock market crashed 120 points, with some bank stocks losing 10 percent of their value. Bush hastily backtracked, dispatching Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady to criticize the idea of interest rate caps. On "Meet the Press," Brady said only rich people would have credit cards if a ceiling were imposed. The legislation was scuttled, and bank stocks then began a huge rally that continued well into 1992.

Given the thousands of cards issued and the stupendous profits made on cards even at much lower rates of interest, the administration's reason for killing caps is fatuous. Bush's flip-flop on the bill simply reflected a temporary pro-consumer lapse that quickly corrected itself, as he returned to his administration's traditional pro-bank stance. The most recent evidence of this bias was Bush's recent and successful lobbying to cut the current FDIC insurance premium hike from 28 cents to 25.4 cents per $100. As the *American Banker* reported last September, the administration saw "higher fees as hurting industry profits." When faced with a choice, Bush would rather see higher bank stock prices for the few than lower consumer bills for the many.

If credit card rates were capped, one would indeed expect to see a decline in the stocks of these lending institutions, as their profit margins dropped. Yet all but one of these banks are much healthier than they were a few years ago, and their stocks would eventually bounce back. In any case, the stock losses would be tiny compared with the gain for debt-ridden consumers.

The exception is Citicorp. A reckless lender, it also happens to be the largest issuer of cards. For Citicorp, chopping rates may mean no longer earning enough to cover the losses it routinely takes on cardholders who stiff the bank, which amounted to $1.1 billion last year alone. A rate drop would drastically impair the bank's current attempts to raise more equity. But saving Citicorp (which has become almost a biennial event ever since the Latin America debt crisis) shouldn't be the only goal of American banking policy.

And so what if Citicorp fails? Sure, taxpayers would have to cover most of its debts, as they have those of savings and loans since the collapse. But there would be some benefits as well. For one, real estate prices might finally hit bottom and begin to recover if a government-controlled Citicorp no longer had to maintain a massive property inventory rather than recognizing its losses honestly. Furthermore, Citicorp's aggressive lending practices—virtually anybody could get a loan or credit card from Citicorp—contributed mightily to the 1980s credit disaster. If the same incompetent bankers are allowed to run the institution after a recovery, how will we prevent a repeat? In any case, there are hundreds of other issuers, including non-banks such as General Electric, General Motors, and AT&T, that will fill the void if Citicorp retreats from the credit card market.

Banks and their lobbyists will argue that indebted credit card holders don't deserve a break. After all, they can pay off their debts anytime they want. But only one in four users actually pays the full balance, and the size of the average outstanding debt on each card continues to grow larger each year. As much as we would like to admonish consumers for foolishly allowing their credit card balances to grow, a recession is not the time to preach thrift.

Intervention is not without precedent—or risk. Carter put the economy into an accelerated tailspin when he set limits on the issuance of credit cards fifteen years ago. At that time, we had rampant inflation, an overheated economy, and soaring interest rates. Despite a much smaller number of cards, Carter's move devastated consumer spending, causing retail sales to plunge. But now we have the opposite problem, a stagnant economy short on credit creation, where the only consumers who have "felt" the lower interest rates are those few who have refinanced their mortgages or bought a new house recently. The only similarity between the Carter era and now is the high rates charged by those who issue credit cards. But then the prime rate was more than 20 percent, so the high rates made sense. Now, with the prime at 6 percent, they don't. Giving consumers a chance to borrow at reasonable rates could get the economy moving again.

JAMES J. CRAMER is president of Cramer & Co., a New York investment management firm.

BATON ROUGE POSTCARD

THROWING BABIES

By Alissa J. Rubin

In mid-afternoon it is dark inside Mildred Henderson's home. The sparsely furnished, three-bedroom rental house is in North Baton Rouge, close by the Mississippi River levee. Mildred wastes no money on electric lights during the day, especially not now. She's saving the money to pay for an abortion.

The abortion is for her son's girlfriend, Tiffany. "I can't raise another child," Mildred says, gesturing to four of her grandsons who are playing a bruising game of tag in the living room. Tiffany will have to leave home if she has the baby, Mildred explains; her family is too poor to support another child. And if that happens, Mildred anticipates that mother and child will land in her house, adding two more mouths to her family of twelve, which already includes six grandchildren. Only one person in the house, her elder daughter's boyfriend, has a full-time job; the other adults piece together food stamps, welfare checks, and occasional work at a local fish-packing plant to make ends meet. Mildred figures she can raise most of the $235 needed for the abortion by using her Social Se-

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curity disability check and letting the rent payment lapse.

Mildred is unusual in urging her son's girlfriend to seek a legal abortion. Many poor black women here avoid abortion clinics. They cannot afford them on their own, and Louisiana was one of the first states to prohibit the use of Medicaid funds for abortions. But even if clinical abortions were more accessible, many poor black women here still would not have them. Most believe abortion to be morally wrong. Black churches preach against it. Repeatedly women told me that "God isn't going to bring a child into the world without a way to take care of it." In a state that has the sixth-highest infant mortality rate in the country and the second-highest percentage of low birth-weight babies, they feel that it is shameful to want to abort a potentially healthy child.

At the same time, however, many poor black women, like Tiffany, cannot afford a child, especially if they have one or more already. As a result, some women here (and all across the rural South) alleviate these conflicting pressures by attempting to end their pregnancies quietly, on their own, often relying on crude methods dating from before the turn of the century. By performing their own abortions, women hope to avoid recriminations from friends and neighbors. As one 16-year-old from New Orleans told me, a home abortion is easier to rationalize than a formal, clinical procedure. "I think that girls feel if they do it at home, it won't count," she said.

Indeed, many of the women I talked to went to great lengths to disguise their abortions not just from their neighbors but from themselves. Rarely did they use the word "abortion." Instead, they referred to the procedure as "bringing it down" or "throwing a baby." "Bring it down" means to bring on menstruation, marking the end of a pregnancy. The phrase echoes mid-nineteenth-century advertisements for midwives, which promised to remedy "blocked menses." Likewise, a woman "throws off" the uterine lining every month. But when she's pregnant and miscarries, she "throws off" a baby. Euphemisms like these, which imply an act of nature, allow a woman to deny that she is aborting a child.

For obvious reasons, just how many women attempt home abortions in Louisiana each year is unknown. Martha Ward, an anthropologist at the University of New Orleans who studies contraception and abortion among poor blacks in the Deep South, says that in years of research she has interviewed hundreds of women, midwives, and licensed practical nurses who have confirmed that home abortions are common. "Clearly it is ongoing, especially in more rural areas," she says. My own research bore this out. In more than two months of interviews in Louisiana, I talked to dozens of poor women who had either tried to end their own pregnancies or knew someone who had.

Mildred described various common methods. "This lady living on Roosevelt Street would stick something about this long up in a girl's vagina," she said, holding her hands about a foot apart. "And then they got people that give you quinine pills and you take that with hot liquids. That brings it down." They still do that today? I asked. "I don't know about the stick," Mildred said, "but quinine's still going on." Angela Henderson, Mildred's 25-year-old daughter, said that another common method is swallowing an entire package of birth control pills at one time. She explained that this is a popular way to "bring it down" because girls can get the pills free from the local parish's health department.

In New Orleans I listened to a young woman describe her efforts to "throw" her second child by taking a bottle of an over-the-counter laxative and drinking a bottle of 8-year-old whiskey. The woman who told her about the remedy insisted that the whiskey had to be aged. "I was drunk and my ears were ringing but it didn't go anywhere," she said. Later she tried a douche with epsom salts. That didn't work either.

In his classic history, *Abortion in America,* James C. Mohr described home abortion methods used by women in the nineteenth century. He recounted how women attempted to induce miscarriages by running and jumping, swallowing poisonous drugs and herbs, and inserting doctors' instruments into their vaginas. A number of these methods are still used today.

"We use pennyroyal and brewers' yeast," said Janice Dickerson, a community organizer and single mother of three in the rural south Louisiana town of Brusly. "It causes spontaneous abortions." Pennyroyal, a member of the mint family, appears in recipes for abortion dating back more than 2,000 years and was commonly recommended in popular nineteenth-century medical guides for women. The plant has a drawback. The amount needed to induce an abortion is about the same amount that causes convulsions, coma, and death.

Predictably, these home remedies are often unsuccessful. Esther, a 27-year-old aide in a Shreveport abortion clinic, described taking "turpentine with sugar" in an effort to abort her third pregnancy. At the time, she was a single mother working at a Burger King on minimum wage and living in low-income housing. "An older friend told me about the turpentine. I thought that would do it. I would have done more, if I thought it would work," she said. It didn't. "Now I got a pretty, healthy, fat baby boy."

The various home "cures" women use to terminate their pregnancies are "limited only by physiology and imagination," says Ward. The primary difference between now and fifty years ago, she has found, is that today women who attempt home abortions rarely end up in the hospital and manage to avoid sterilization, the procedure doctors most often used to save the lives of women who had severe infections after botched abortions.

Occasionally, however, horrible incidents still occur. A woman recently arrived at the Hope Medical Center in Shreveport, one of the largest abortion clinics in the state, having attempted to self-abort three times in two months: with knitting needles, by douching with a mixture of Purex bleach and quinine, and by taking an overdose of over-the-counter drugs. "Her uterus was in pretty bad shape," said Dale Bauman,

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the obstetrician-gynecologist who ultimately performed her abortion for a much reduced fee.

The high risk and low success rate don't seem to be having much effect on the number of women who attempt their own abortions. Nearly every one of the more than thirty women I talked to seemed to have her own "cure." During my conversation with Mildred and her daughter, Mildred's next-door neighbor Mattie stopped by and joined in. The methods Mildred was describing may work some of the time, she said, but Mattie had a surefire way to end an unwanted pregnancy. "If you really want to throw a baby," she said, "you drink some nutmeg. You get it round like a rock and put it in hot water. And don't eat." Then, she explained, you "jump off something high, like a roof or a high porch and you lose your baby. I told a lot of girls about that." Won't they break their ankles? I asked. Maybe, Mattie said, but "that'll heal up."

ALISSA J. RUBIN is an Alicia Patterson Fellow writing about abortion.

George Bush's aversion to change.

NOODLER

By James Mann

The conventional wisdom about George Bush is that he has been a consistent China lover, and that his steadfast views about China policy contrast with his opportunistic behavior on other issues. One of the very few principles on which Bush has remained unyielding throughout his career, it is argued, is his belief in strong U.S. ties with the Communist leadership in Beijing. You know the standard analysis: Bush became involved in Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's opening toward China, served as head of the U.S. liaison office in Beijing, and ever since then has taken firm, though unpopular, stands in favor of a relationship with the People's Republic.

These prevailing assumptions are wrong. Bush was at best a marginal figure during the Nixon-Kissinger opening to China. And the historical record demonstrates that Bush has flip-flopped on China the way he has on everything else. His real bias has been toward the status quo. Indeed, to the extent that Bush has taken unpopular stands, it has been primarily in instances where others have sought change in the long-established order.

Bush was first exposed to China policy when he served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations in 1971. He fought hard to oppose China's admission to the U.N., even as Nixon and Kissinger undercut him through furtive diplomacy with Beijing. When the United States lost the General Assembly vote and Beijing won a U.N. seat, Bush was devastated. "Sitting there in the U.S. ambassador's chair, I could feel not only bitterness but disgust at the scene taking place," he admitted in his autobiography, *Looking Forward*. Bush's first China experience was as an overly enthusiastic underling following what he thought was the official line, just as the policy was secretly being changed.

In 1974, after Nixon resigned, Bush won an appointment to the U.S. liaison office in Beijing. (This was a consolation prize. He had served Nixon loyally as chairman of the Republican National Committee and had hoped that Gerald Ford would choose him as vice president.) The office was the unofficial U.S. Embassy in China before the two countries established diplomatic relations.

In recent years Bush has portrayed himself as a major actor in top-level policy discussions with Beijing during his thirteen-month tenure. The Ford presidential archives show otherwise. On October 15, 1974, Bush stopped by the White House to say farewell to Ford before leaving for his new assignment in Beijing. It was an awkward goodbye. Secretary of State Kissinger assigned his deputy, Brent Scowcroft, to sit in on the meeting. Kissinger then sent Ford a secret memo of "talking points" to raise with Bush—effectively telling Bush to keep his head down and not do anything in China that would interfere with Kissinger's work.

The memo instructed Bush not to deal on his own with Chinese leaders such as Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Chou En-lai. Bush could convey Ford's regards to Mao and Chou, but only through routine bureaucratic channels at the Foreign Ministry. Given the intensely personal nature of Chinese diplomacy, the White House in effect was asking Bush to tell the Chinese he was irrelevant. "I am confident that you will take in stride some of the frustrations of working and living in Peking, including the low-key nature of our public posture there," Kissinger's memo instructed Ford to tell Bush. "You will have an opportunity to participate in high-level talks with the Chinese during Secretary Kissinger's upcoming visit to Peking." Once on the job, Bush was to learn that most of the active Sino-American diplomacy took place not in Beijing but in Washington—between Kissinger and Huang Zhen, Bush's counterpart, the head of China's liaison office in the United States.

Near the end of 1974, a month after his arrival, Bush got his first chance to meet Chinese leaders during Kissinger's visit. Those meetings "gave me a rare opportunity to pick up information about the latest developments in Sino-American relations," he wrote in his 1987 autobiography. It must have been less enticing at the time. Ford Library files show that by March 1975, scarcely five months after arriving, Bush wanted to come home. In an internal White House memo, White House staffer Russ Rourke wrote to his boss, Jack Marsh, one of Ford's top aides, "It's my impression and partial understanding that George Bush has probably had enough of egg rolls and Peking by now.... Don't you think he

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would make an outstanding candidate for secretary of commerce or a similar post during the next six months?"

Bush was apparently so eager to get back to Washington that he would have settled for the Commerce job. He almost got it. In November 1975 Ford announced a Cabinet reshuffle, and the Ford Library archives show that Marsh prepared a cable congratulating Bush on his appointment as commerce secretary. But the words "commerce secretary" are crossed out, and above them the words "director of central intelligence" penciled in.

At that time, in the wake of the Church Committee investigations of the CIA, Ford needed someone who could fend off further efforts on Capitol Hill to rein in the CIA. Kissinger needed someone who would not interfere with his own dominance over foreign policy. Bush, who had served both as a congressman and as an unchallenging subordinate to Kissinger, was their man. In an internal 1975 memo to Ford outlining the pros and cons of various candidates for the CIA, Ford's assistant and later defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, wrote next to Bush's name the ambiguous virtue: "proven adaptability."

Although Bush had had no discernible influence over American policy during his thirteen months in Beijing, he avoided offending the Chinese leadership—enough to qualify as what the Chinese call *lao pengyou*, an old friend of China. And so in September 1977, after Ford lost the election, Bush returned to China, this time as a private citizen. His traveling party included, among others, James A. Baker III, Bush's Houston friend who had served as Ford's campaign manager; *Washington Post* reporter David Broder; and broadcaster Lowell Thomas. The leaders in Beijing granted Bush a special favor: he and his party were among the first Westerners allowed into Tibet since the Chinese occupation more than a quarter century earlier. The purpose was in part tourism, but Bush found time for a few political observations. He seemed genuinely impressed with Chinese rule in Tibet.

"Tibet is clearly being assimilated by the Peking government," Bush wrote in *Newsweek* after his return. "The Chinese seem justifiably proud of economic achievements.... The Tibetans have been permitted to retain something of their culture and native dress." During the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution that had just ended, China had savaged Tibet, killing and imprisoning thousands of monks, destroying monasteries, and smashing Buddhist art in a religious persecution as severe as any in modern times. Bush, just out of the CIA, either didn't see the devastation or didn't think it was worth writing about. But he did pass on to *Newsweek*'s readers the official Chinese propaganda line about Tibet: "The Dalai Lama, who now lives in India, is the subject of constant attack for the lavish splendor of his former lifestyle and his callous attitude toward the people. The [Chinese] government maintains a rather gruesome historical museum with statues depicting various tortures supposedly practiced by the monks—cutting off peasants' hands and burying children alive."

Yet Bush's love for China was not so great as to support a bold move toward formal American recognition of Beijing—particularly not a move made by a Democratic president at a time that was politically inconvenient for Bush. On the night of December 15, 1978, President Carter went on national television to announce his decision to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing. Carter's action was the most important development in U.S.-Chinese relations since Nixon's 1972 trip; it was the culmination of efforts begun by Nixon and Kissinger to court China as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. And what was Bush's reaction? He upbraided Carter and the Democrats. "We gave all and got nothing" in return, Bush fumed on the night of Carter's announcement. That was not just a hasty quip. A week later, on December 24, 1978, Bush wrote a 2,100-word article for *The Washington Post*'s Outlook section titled, "Our Deal with Peking: All Cost, No Benefit," excoriating Carter and his administration.

Carter's action was "an abject American retreat," Bush asserted. "China needs us more than we need them.... China ... has now seen just how easily we can be pushed around." Bush's argument was that the United States should have obtained stronger guarantees regarding the safety of Taiwan than Carter had obtained. At this point, Bush was preparing to run against Ronald Reagan for the Republican nomination for president. Reagan was an old friend of Taiwan, and Bush was guarding his right flank. But whatever his motivation, Bush's language was remarkably similar to that used by the Democratic leadership in criticizing Bush's China policy today.

Bush's sympathy for Taiwan's plight didn't last long. In 1980, after Reagan won the Republican nomination and chose Bush as his vice presidential nominee, Bush flip-flopped again. Reagan created a small ruckus during the campaign by suggesting he would re-establish the official U.S. ties with Taiwan that Carter had broken off. In the middle of the campaign, Bush was sent to Beijing to smooth things over. He told the Chinese leadership that Reagan, "if elected, would not set back the clock.... [He] would not go in for some two-China policy." Even as Bush spoke, however, Reagan was back home reasserting his Taiwan policy. Hearing of this, Bush "grimaced and put a hand to his forehead, but declined comment," according to Harry Harding's book, *A Fragile Relationship*.

This was a new role for Bush, and it was one he continued throughout the 1980s, serving as Reagan's channel to Beijing. Although often expressing admiration for Taiwan, Reagan, once in the White House, went along with the advice of the State Department and Pentagon, avoiding any step toward official ties with Taiwan's Nationalist government. And Bush, who had positioned himself as a critic of Carter's supposedly soft stance toward Beijing, became one of the top advocates in Washington of policies supporting the People's Republic.

Ever since the Nixon opening, officials in Beijing have cultivated one or two American officials as their special allies within successive administrations. During the Nixon era, the Chinese decided to deal with Kissinger. In

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the Carter years, their top ally was national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. After the departure in 1982 of Kissinger's former right-hand man, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Bush became China's best friend, conduit, and contact in the Reagan administration. Bush traveled to China in 1982 to help work out a deal limiting U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and went again in 1985 to reassure U.S. companies encountering their first problems doing business in China. In Washington Bush met so often with Chinese Ambassador Han Xu that they became close friends. A few days before Christmas 1988, President-elect Bush and his wife visited Han at his residence. "It was an invitation the Bushes chose to accept, from the hundreds available to them, because of their feeling for the ambassador and his wife and for China," the *Post*'s Broder later wrote. "It was, unmistakably, an evening of friendship, almost a family gathering."

In February 1989, little more than a month after being inaugurated, Bush traveled to China after attending the funeral of Japan's Emperor Hirohito in Tokyo. Bush was greeted at the State Guest House in Beijing by Premier Li Peng. The premier gave the Bushes a gift of two bicycles; Bush reciprocated by handing Li Peng a pair of black leather Texas boots, one with an American flag on it and the other with a Chinese flag.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Despite the appearance of normality, the trip presented a rare opportunity. The U.S. Embassy in China had recommended, and administration officials in Washington had approved, extending an invitation to dissident scientist Fang Lizhi, China's best-known proponent of democratization, to attend a banquet hosted by Bush and attended by top Chinese leaders such as President Yang Shangkun and Li. The invitation represented a small but significant recognition of the need for political pluralism in China, as Reagan's 1988 meeting with dissidents had in Moscow. It was unlike anything done before by American presidents or top officials in China.

However, when Chinese security officials physically barred Fang from attending the banquet, the Bush administration, instead of defending the invitation, apologized for it. Senior aides disavowed any role in the invitation or any change in the relationship with China, blaming the idea on then U.S. Ambassador to China Winston Lord. Indeed, Bush himself "expressed regret" over the incident when he said farewell to Vice Premier Wu Xueqian. Thus, in his first days in office, Bush signaled to Beijing that in any showdown over human rights, his administration would likely back down.

Later that spring came Tiananmen Square. By the best estimates of American intelligence officials, more than 1,000 people died on June 3. The Bush administration has generally refused to refer to what happened that night as a "massacre," choosing instead to call it a "tragedy." Bush and his supporters now argue that the sanctions the United States subsequently imposed were among the toughest in the world. What officials neglect to say is that Bush acted only in response to intense congressional and public pressure; that he tried repeatedly to ease or counteract that pressure; and that in some cases, Bush moved secretly with Beijing to limit or subvert the impact of his own sanctions. Bush secretly sent Scowcroft, his national security adviser, to China five weeks after the massacre to reassure top Chinese leaders of his desire to restore good relations.

In the White House, Bush has often acted like a man obsessed with maintaining the best possible relations with Beijing's Communist leadership. But that is not the pattern of his entire career. His China policy is more a reflection of his basic instincts than of his inconsequential thirteen months in Beijing. It is no different than his conduct toward the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Japan, or, for that matter, Iraq. In each instance, Bush has sought to preserve the existing order and to resist change. For Bush, China is not an exception. It's a case study.

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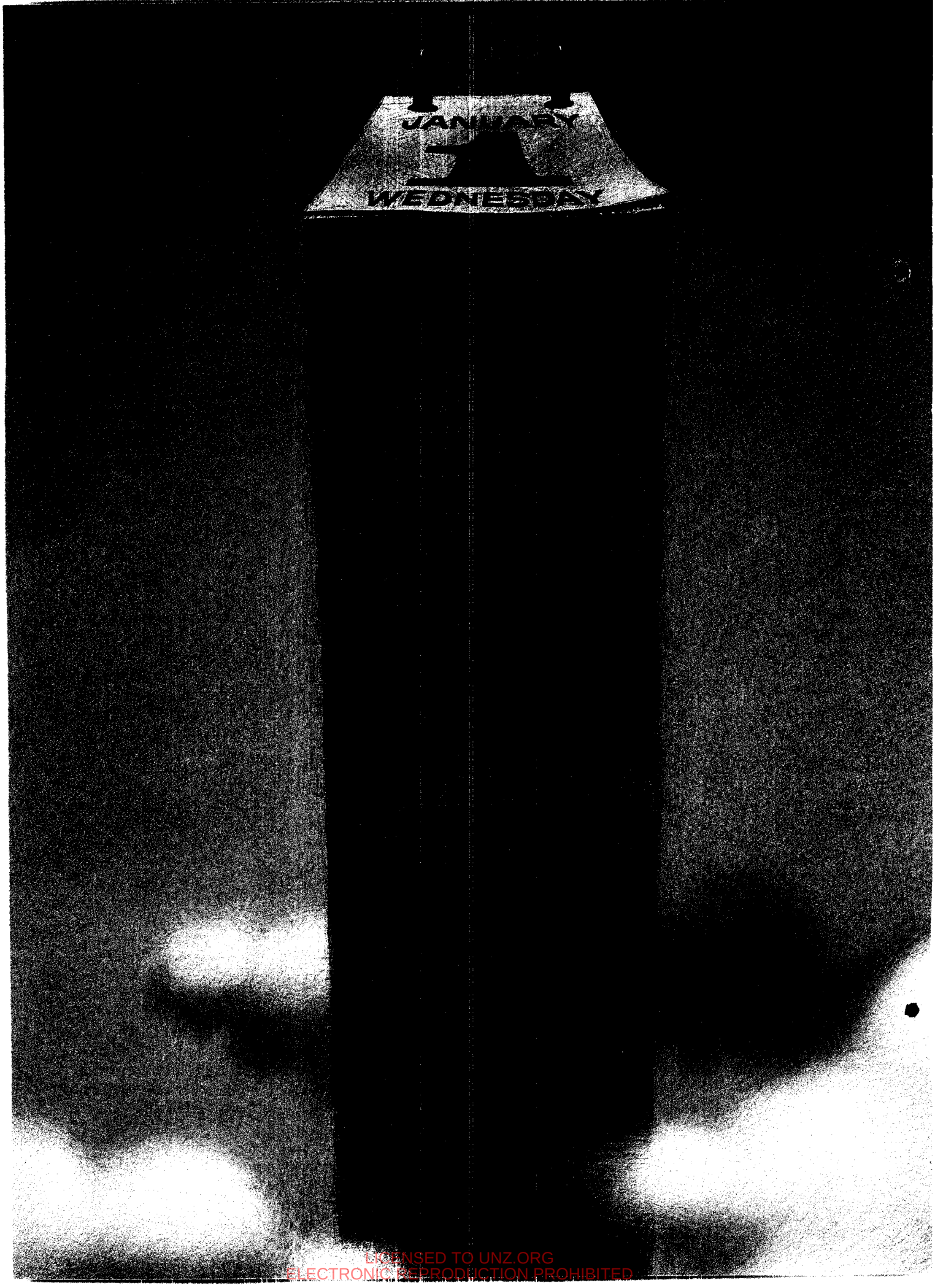

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THE RED MENACE

By John B. Judis

No subject has been treated as frivolously in the election campaign as the federal deficit. President Bush, while proclaiming his support for a balanced budget amendment, has promised generous new tax cuts and no tax increases—making deficit reduction unlikely. Bill Clinton's economic plan—"Putting People First"—skirts lightly over the deficit, relying on Pollyannish estimates of economic growth and tax revenues to cut it only in half in four years. Meanwhile, Clinton has advanced expensive new initiatives in health care and public infrastructure without adequately explaining how he would pay for them.

Yet when the next president takes office in January, few subjects will loom as large as the deficit. This year's is a record $350 billion. That's almost 6 percent of GNP; interest charges alone will absorb 14 percent of the budget. If the deficit continues to grow at the rate it has over the last twelve years, interest costs will eventually absorb more than a quarter of the budget, making it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for the government to perform even its most basic functions.

Foreign lenders might be able to help, but if their debts continue to rise, foreigners are going to become more reluctant to hold dollars, and the status of the dollar as an international currency could go the way of the pound sterling. The United States could suddenly find itself a second-class citizen in the world economy, subject to the same strictures as Nigeria.

If such a calamity awaits us, why aren't the candidates discussing it? The obvious reason is politics. Over the last two decades, the American political class has made it impossible to discuss budget cuts or tax increases. The Democrats deserve some of the blame for this. In 1972 Democratic presidential aspirant Wilbur Mills, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, engineered a 20 percent increase in Social Security benefits and a 100 percent cost of living allowance. But conservative Republicans have done most of the damage. In the late 1970s they discovered a regressive tax cut strategy—epitomized by California's Proposition 13 and the Kemp-Roth tax cut plan—that united country club Republicans with suburban independents and middle-class Democrats. Any deviation from this orthodoxy was severely penalized, as Bush discovered in October 1990.

But opportunism alone does not explain politicians' indifference to deficits. A generation of economists, Washington policy experts, and publicists have argued that deficits are either desirable or don't matter. Proponents of supply-side economics have pooh-poohed worries. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Jack Kemp accuses deficit-cutters of "worshiping at the shrine of Herbert Hoover." In his new book *The Seven Fat Years*, *Wall Street Journal* editorial page editor Robert Bartley describes the deficit threat as "grossly overrated."

Liberal economists, while attacking the injustice of the Reagan tax cuts, have belittled concern about their fiscal effects. In *The Debt and the Deficit*, economists Robert Heilbroner and Peter Bernstein contend that "the national debt is not large," and recommend continued deficits of 2 to 3 percent of GNP. Max Sawicky, an economist with the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, writes in the September *Dollars & Sense* that "the real economic burden of the deficit on the economy is not significant at present. Even in the event of higher deficits, their negative economic impacts are likely to be small."

These arguments have often carried the day because the opposing arguments have been so unsophisticated. Critics of the deficit have continued to rely on moral shibboleths and pre-Keynesian theories of public finance. It's easy to counter these arguments. Unless one believes usury is a sin, deficits are not immoral. And not all deficits have harmed the economy. Indeed, the periodic deficits that the United States ran for three decades after World War II benefited Americans by mitigating the normal downturn of the business cycle.

The case against deficits rests on understanding how they function in a competitive world economy that the United States no longer dominates. Deficits, which used to be benign, have become malignant. The change can be seen in the relationship between the budget deficit and the trade deficit. In the 1950s, when American manufacturers reigned supreme and when a backlog of demand for steel and automobiles still existed, the United States could run budget deficits

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during downturns without jeopardizing its trade balance. As late as the 1975-76 recession, America sustained a surplus in spite of demand created by the deficit. But by the 1980s, with American manufacturers threatened by low-cost, high-quality imports, and with supply outrunning demand in major industries, budget deficits have helped fuel merchandise trade deficits, even during recessions.

The most important change has occurred in the complex relationship among budget deficits, interest rates, and economic growth. From 1979 through the present, the numbers show unusually high budget deficits, unusually high long-term real interest rates, and lagging economic growth and investment.

- The federal budget deficit has risen from 1.7 percent of GNP to more than 6 percent. The ratio of overall debt to GNP has climbed from 26 percent to 50 percent. Interest payments have climbed to 13.8 percent of GNP.
- Long-term real interest rates (nominal rates minus inflation), which had gravitated between 1 percent and 2 percent in prior decades, have remained stubbornly high, even after the Federal Reserve won its bout with inflation. They peaked at 8.1 percent in 1984, but were still 5.6 percent in 1988. Today, in the midst of a deep recession, they remain above 4 percent. (By contrast, they were 0.7 percent during the 1971 downturn and 0.5 percent in 1976.)
- Economic growth has slowed. The average annual increase in GNP has declined from 3.3 percent in the 1970s to 2.85 percent in the 1980s, while the rate of net private investment fell from 7.2 percent in the 1970s to 5.6 percent in the 1980s.

The question of whether deficits matter rests on the connection among these three sets of statistics. Those saying deficits matter argue that high deficits cause high interest rates, which cause flagging growth. Those saying deficits don't matter have taken the opposite tack, arguing that slow economic growth (resulting from growing international competition) has caused high interest rates and high deficits. But the causal relationship runs in both directions. Deficits matter, but so do the new challenges to American competitiveness. And both have to be addressed by policy-makers.

Consider why long-term real interest rates have remained so abnormally high for the last twelve years. Increased international competition and global overcapacity in key industries have certainly dampened investor confidence and helped to force up rates. But the large deficits of the '80s contributed to higher real interest rates by raising the demand for credit. And these higher rates discouraged private investment in the same way that very high tax rates would have.

The same pattern has persisted during the recession, making it more difficult for the economy to turn upward. During the recession the demand for loan capital decreased, putting downward pressure on long-term interest rates. Yet while short-term rates, dictated by the Federal Reserve, have hit a fifteen-year low, real long-term rates have not fallen accordingly. One important reason is the expectation of continuing budget deficits. Bond traders, expecting that the deficits will continue, fear that in the future high interest rates and rising prices will choke off any robust recovery. Uncertain about future prospects, they want higher than usual returns on their bond purchases, even during a recession.

Investment consultant Michael Evans expressed this prevalent reasoning in an *Industry Week* column:

> Some might claim that once the recovery is firmly established, consumer and business optimism will improve enough that spending in those sectors will rise, and exports will also improve as a more robust U.S. economy boosts growth around the globe. That would, of course, be the normal way recoveries occur. However, I don't see that happening, because every time the economy starts to grow faster than 2.5 percent, higher inflation and interest rates combine to knock real growth back to subpar levels.

The bond traders' reasoning about the future keeps real interest rates high. These high rates, which are prompted by the expectation of future deficits, further weaken private investment and make it more difficult to escape the recession.

But nothing more clearly dramatizes the importance of reducing the budget deficit than the perilous relationship between high interest rates and large deficits. As budget deficits have contributed to high real interest rates, these interest rates have created what David P. Calleo, writing in *The Bankrupting of America*, calls a "Ponzi effect," causing the deficit to spiral. When the rate of interest on Treasury bills exceeds the rate of growth in national income, as it has since 1979, then, all things being equal, interest on the national debt grows faster than revenue. If the government continues to run deficits, then debt and interest absorb greater and greater portions of the budget itself. Only if income growth and revenue begin to exceed the rate of interest, or if the deficit is reduced proportionately through higher taxes or spending cuts, can the upward spiral be halted.

If it is not halted, not only will real long-term interest rates stay high, discouraging investment; but the government won't have money to spur new investment and improve American products. Bridges and roads will fall into disrepair. Worker training programs will shut down. This will help create a downward investment spiral to match the upward spiral of interest rates. And Americans will suffer a corresponding erosion in their standard of living—not only from diminishing government services, but also from slowing economic growth and declining real income. Halting these spirals requires cutting the budget deficit drastically.

In a study published last summer, the General Accounting Office demonstrated this Ponzi effect with computer simulations of what would happen over the

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next three decades if different budgetary options were pursued. The first option allowed the deficit to rise as a percentage of GNP at the same rate it has during the Reagan and Bush administrations. The second, favored by Heilbroner and implicit in the Clinton budget, maintained the budget deficit at 3 percent of GNP for the next thirty years. The third would achieve a balanced budget by 2001.

From following the first strategy, the GAO found, the deficit would go from 3 percent to 20.6 percent of GNP by 2020, and annual interest on the debt would consume 31.5 percent of the budget—the proportion that Social Security and health now take up. Per capita income would decline, foreign debt would skyrocket. By 2012, the GAO estimated, the United States would be reduced to Third World debtor status.

But the GAO also predicted dire straits if the United States followed the 3 percent deficit strategy. Because of the Ponzi effect, even limiting debt to 3 percent of GNP would create escalating interest costs that would hamstring federal policy. "It only postpones the date of a full confrontation with the underlying problem," the study stated. "After 2005, the amount of deficit reduction action required annually to stay on the 3 percent path increases exponentially. Measured in constant dollars, it exceeds half a trillion dollars by 2020 and is still rising."

The only hope, the GAO argued, is for the United States to achieve a balanced budget early in the next century. By cutting the deficit, an administration will cause real interest rates to fall, which will lower the cost of the deficit. A vicious circle will be replaced by a friendly one. "Early action to reduce the deficit," the GAO wrote, "pays huge dividends in lower interest costs. Declining interest costs reduce the amount of deficit reduction that must come from program cuts or revenue increases."

The GAO study foresees America's international position being threatened by persistent deficits. One reason that real interest rates declined slightly from 1987 to 1989 was a huge influx of foreign capital, some of it to purchase American companies but some of it to buy American Treasury bonds. About 15 percent to 20 percent of the national debt is now foreign-owned.

As long as the dollar is the accepted international currency, America's foreign debt has not posed a serious problem. In fact, because the debt is in dollars, when the dollar declines internationally, the U.S. debt itself declines. But by continuing to run budget and trade deficits and to rely on foreign capital to buy Treasury bonds and stimulate private investment, the United States could eventually incite a revolt against the dollar. It could find itself in the same position as Australia did in the early '80s: forced by foreign creditors and the prospect of a lowered bond rating to take immediate steps to eliminate its deficit.

The Economist warned the United States recently in an editorial that paying debts in a country's own currency "is such a tempting privilege that it always ends up being abused. The issuer of a widely accepted money starts to consume more than it produces, and eventually the holders of its IOUs begin asking for a different kind of payment." According to the GAO, this eventuality will occur early in the next century if the United States continues along its present deficit path.

What, then, is to be done about the deficit? Although the two major presidential candidates have ignored the problem, a debate has taken place off-stage, inspired in part by the efforts of Paul Tsongas, Warren Rudman, and Peter Peterson, who on September 14 inaugurated the anti-deficit Concord Coalition, and by Ross Perot, who last August released his budget proposal as a book, *United We Stand*. But even these initiatives stop short of confronting the problems caused by the simultaneous occurrence of high budget deficits and heightened international competition.

There are three alternatives being debated. The simpleminded budget cutters believe that cutting the deficit should take precedence over all other economic priorities; and they want the United States to move as quickly as it can to a balanced budget. The cutters range from Michel Camdessus, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, to Republican Bill Zeliff, a first-term New Hampshire representative. Although Camdessus recognizes that cutting the budget or raising taxes in the midst of difficult times could cause significant hardship, conservatives like Zeliff approach deficit-reduction with the same dreamy rigor that their supply-sider colleagues approach tax reduction. Writing in *The Washington Times*, Zeliff argued that Congress could balance the budget in five years without tax increases, "major reductions" in entitlements, or reductions in military spending beyond those proposed last year by the Bush administration. Dream on.

The conservative deficit-cutters believe that by removing funds from public consumption through cutting the budget, they will be transferred to private savings, where they will become the basis for private investment and economic growth. Unfortunately, economies don't always work this way, as Herbert Hoover discovered in 1931. Budget deficits now contribute to lagging economic growth; but lagging economic growth brought about by international competition also contributes to budget deficits. Both problems have to be addressed.

In addition, the cutters' strategy of axing programs during a world slowdown could prove disastrous. Cuts during a recession only work when other nations are in an upturn and are spurring their own domestic demand. Japan and Australia both eliminated their budget deficits during the 1980s without great hardship because they were able to cushion the loss of domestic demand through rising exports. But the United States does not have that luxury. Undertaking the cutters' draconian strategy could easily

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turn a recession into a depression—and make it still more difficult to balance the budget.

The second strategy is to grow and then trim. The growers think Americans should focus on stimulating new investment, even at the expense of larger deficits. They describe present concern with the deficit as a "mania" that is creating "paralysis." Conservative growers like Kemp urge tax cuts that will inspire business, while liberals urge public investment that will contribute to private investment and improve American competitiveness. Once the economy returns to "robust health," in Robert Kuttner's words, the deficit can then be "trimmed" to a lower percentage of GNP, but it should not be eliminated. Kuttner, like Heilbroner, recommends keeping the deficit at about 3 percent of GNP.

The growers, unlike the cutters, see that the government must do something to improve American competitiveness, but they refuse to recognize that it must also begin by taking steps to reduce the deficit—even if these are limited to the adoption of a long-term plan that will take effect after the recession is over. The growers also set their sights too low. As the GAO report shows, "trimming" the growth of the deficit to 3 percent of GNP will not necessarily stop the spiral of rising interest costs from absorbing more and more of the budget. (In addition—if past experience holds—targeting deficits at 3 percent of GNP will result in deficits at 4 or 5 percent.)

The third strategy is to grow-and-cut. The grow-and-cutters believe that a new administration has to have programs directed at both stimulating private investment and reducing the budget deficit. Perot and the Concord Coalition of Tsongas, Rudman, and Peterson favor a mix of tax cuts and public investment to stimulate private investment. They don't call for major cuts during the recession, but they insist that a new administration develop and win public support for a plan to balance the budget over the next decade—the goal also embraced by the GAO report.

This strategy makes the most sense, but as it is proposed, it has some glaring weakness. Perot's plan is probably too precipitous—projecting a balanced budget by 1998 rather than 2001—and relies on the misleading rhetoric of the simpleminded cutters to justify it. Although it contains some unpleasant and needed specifics, such as means-testing Social Security and instituting a gasoline tax, it seems evasive in other areas, such as overall health cost containment.

The Concord Coalition's founding document is even more disappointing. It is far less specific or bold than Tsongas's presidential campaign proposals. It calls for "concrete reforms in our trillion dollar system of federal entitlements" without saying what they would be; it calls for "careful and judicious cuts in defense spending" but withholds any judgment about specifics; and it advocates "drastic overhaul of our medical system" without explaining what that entails.

This lack of specifics demonstrates that even three men who are not running for office blanch at proposing changes that will bring down the wrath of large organized constituencies—from the American Association of Retired People and the American Federation of State, Municipal, and County Employees to the Health Insurance Association of America. Between the goal pronounced by the Perot people and the Concord Coalition and its execution lies a veritable chasm called politics.

Next January a new administration will step into this chasm. If it is Bush redux, fear the worst. Since the members of his own party rejected his deficit plan in October 1990, Bush has been incapable of addressing the deficit. He has acceded to the conservatives who, committed to the political logic of Proposition 13, have ruled out any tax increases and have pressured for tax cuts. And Bush himself has been unwilling to contemplate either medical cost containment or major reductions in military spending. Nothing will change in a Bush second term.

If Clinton takes office, he will have the advantage of being elected as a candidate of reform. He could parlay voter enthusiasm into support for a program addressed at stimulating investment and cutting the deficit. But in the last year Clinton has made no effort whatsoever to build a mandate for cutting the deficit. During the Democratic primary campaign, he even went out of his way to attack Tsongas's eminently reasonable proposals for reducing the deficit. He would have to press very hard during his first six months—over significant opposition inside and outside his own party—to build support for a long-term plan that requires short-term sacrifice.

Clinton and his advisers have shown no indication that they would be willing to do this. Clinton's economic advisers tilt slightly toward the growers rather than the grow-and-cutters. Rob Shapiro of the Democratic Leadership Council says, "We reject the idea that the deficit itself is the problem." And Clinton himself remains a mystery. One adviser assured me that Clinton was privately a "deficit hawk," but another equally close adviser told me that Clinton agreed with Kuttner's ideas on the deficit. It does not bode well that two men with whom he consults regularly on the economy could come away with such divergent impressions.

Barring decisive steps in the first months of a new Bush or Clinton administration, the United States will find itself caught in a continuing spiral of debt. Change may eventually come, but only when the current brush fire has already become a four-alarm blaze, devouring Americans' livelihoods and threatening the country's standing in the world. By that time, what now seem like difficult choices—fifty cents more a gallon for gasoline or reduced Social Security and Medicare benefits for the well-to-do—will have become irrelevant palliatives. And America, which once accounted for half of the world's GNP, will have become a fiscal Brazil. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Deaths of Salesmen

David Mamet wrote the screenplay of **Glengarry Glen Ross** (New Line), and the difference from his original play underscores one of his attributes: his sensitivity to form. It clearly wasn't enough for him to do the usual rotisserie slicing of a play for film serving, cutting it up and rearranging it differently on the platter, with a garnish of material that was only described in the play and can now be shown. Mamet obviously wanted to reshape the work, to gather it back into himself and give it a new manifestation.

The play is in two acts, designed so that their two differing shapes support the inner action of the piece. Act One has three scenes, each between two men, each in a Chinese restaurant. (The place connotes low-price *luxe*.) Each scene virtually slams us face-to-face with its characters in a situation that leaves them disclosed, quivering. Four of the six men are salesmen for the same pressure-cooked real estate firm; one is their boss; the sixth is a stranger who ends up as a customer of one of them. Overall, the act is like a triptych depicting a series of secular crucifixions.

Act Two is the secular Calvary, the real estate office, the place from which those three scenes derive and toward which they return. This act is one long continuous scene. To change figures, it's as if the three tributaries of the first act fed into and swelled a stream.

For the film, Mamet decided that the abutment of two different "act" structures would not serve. Apparently he thought that the opening three duologues, so gripping in the theater, would look stagey on the screen. He opted then to give the whole picture the same texture throughout.

Working backward, so to speak, he rendered the materials of Act One to blend filmically with Act Two, though not in one setting, not in one continuous scene like the second half. He reworked Act One into short scenes, so that, instead of three substantial scenes feeding into a long one, the film is a set of small pieces that assemble into a mosaic. I can't say that the new form is as powerful as the original, but perhaps this is because I so admire the play. In any case, the new form functions well on film and is in its own way a conduit for several kinds of darkness.

The place, unspecified, is presumably Chicago; the time is unspecified but presumably it's the 1960s. (Mamet, I've read, worked in a Chicago real estate office when he was young.) Four salesmen are scrabbling to sell chunks of real estate in Florida and elsewhere to middle-class people as investments. The film's title is the name of a real estate development. The four men have been pitted against one another in a sales contest with a Cadillac as first prize. Second prize is a set of steak knives. Third prize: "You're fired."

Here are the four salesmen, three of them worn, one of them rapt. Shelley Levene, the oldest, almost but not quite over the hill. (In the play he mentions a daughter. In the film Mamet puts that daughter in a hospital to turn up the heat on Levene.) George Aaronow, a plodder. Dave Moss, a wiry schemer. And Ricky Roma, the youngest, the ace of the team, cocky, successful because he is intoxicated with the rituals of selling.

Their immediate chief is John Williamson, a stooge for the main office downtown. For the film, Mamet has added Blake, a slick emissary from downtown. Blake is there to crack the whip and to crystallize the contempt in which the salesmen are held. (Roma is absent during Blake's one scene.) This he does in the usual vile language of the play.

A note on that language. It jars only for the first few minutes. Unlike the gutter spillage of so many films, which never ceases to jar, Mamet's dialogue quickly shows that it's not vulgar just because vulgarity is now licensed: it comes out of these men as a petty revenge on the lives that they are in.

"Leads" are the key to their selling. These leads are the names of prospects provided by the firm; and the quality of those leads, good or less good, is a sentence of success or failure, almost self-perpetuating. A salesman who does well gets good leads, others get dimmer ones. So failure spawns failure, unless there's a stroke of good luck—with leads or with customers.

This condition produces the second half of the film (Act Two originally), which follows a robbery in the office. Someone broke in and stole a fresh, juicy set of leads. Management has called the police. The ending is in one way surprising, in another way not.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Best Intentions. *Unique. A screenwriter (Ingmar Bergman) deals with his own parents' courtship and early marriage. The candor is comprehended by the director, Bille August. (Reviewed 8/10/92)* **Bob Roberts.** *Nothing new about American politicking, but writer-director-star Tim Robbins treats it all with pyrotechnical sizzle. (10/5/92)* **Hero.** *A comedy-drama in Frank Capra mode about a low-life who is catapulted into heroism, a drifter who grabs the honors, and a T.V. newswoman who supervises it all. Dustin Hoffman, Andy Garcia, and Geena Davis evoke (what else?) laughs and tears. (10/19/92)* **Husbands and Wives.** *As usual, a Woody Allen picture that would have been better with someone else in his part. But his script punches a lot of recognition buttons. (10/19/92)* **—SK**

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The actors understand Mamet's dialogue: the racing, the broken sentences, the sense that the mouth is trying frantically to keep up with frantic thoughts and with the hints of response in others—all this varied with occasional unfurlings of rhetoric. Good dialogue is always contrapuntal: what is said runs alongside what is not said. Mamet, somewhat under the tutelage of Pinter (whom he reveres), has widened the space between the two concurrent lines of force. (Was he on hand to work with these actors?)

As Levene, Jack Lemmon suppresses much of the surface "indicating" he has been doing lately and cuts much closer to the bone. Alan Arkin breathes mild mediocrity as Aaronow, and Ed Harris gives Moss the bitter slyness he needs. The office boss, Kevin Spacey, is adequate, and, in his brief appearance as Blake, the bastard from downtown, Alec Baldwin wields smoking iron. Another leading actor in a small role: the English star, Jonathan Pryce, is reticently pitiful as the stranger whom Roma overwhelms. But acting honors go, as inevitably they must if Roma is well played, to Al Pacino.

Pacino is a Mamet veteran. His theater performance in *American Buffalo* remains in the mind as a landmark of naturalistic acting plumbed so far that it went deeper than detail and found essence—the same poetic essence that any artistic style, well practiced, must reach. Pacino understands that Mamet's purpose is not mere stenography, at which he easily excels, but the contemporary music of the gab and the agony under it. Pacino reminds us here that Mamet's antecedent is not Gorky but the expressionism of Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller.

But Roma's role, as adapted for film, brings up my one real grievance. In Roma's first scene, he strikes up a conversation with a stranger in the Chinese restaurant, and after much talk, almost all of it his, he succumbs to his habit, his fix, his obsession. He starts to sell real estate to the stranger just because he can't help doing it, even as he disparages what he's doing. The whole monologue, which it virtually is, from conversational start through pungent musings to the sheer ecstasy of selling, is one of the finest Dionysian swirls in twentieth-century American drama. In the film it is interrupted by a cut to another pair for a while, after which we return for the finish of the soliloquy. I regretted the interruption very much.

James Foley directed with emphasis on large close-ups, perhaps trying to recapture the feeling of the theater's Act One on film. Juan Ruiz Anchia's cinematography is too lush. It didn't need to be grim, but these rich colors are inapt without being ironic. Still, the film is a harrowing rendition of the excellent play. It confirms that Mamet achieved the work about the fake-smiling drudges of the business world that, some thirty-five years earlier, Arthur Miller had been groping for. Mamet's salesmen don't literally die. They don't need to. A worse death has already begun. •

The discovery of history in a Polish forest.

Stopping by Woods

By Simon Schama

It was not until I saw the mound at Giby that I grasped how landscape may hold memory. At first glance, when it flashed by the window of the old Mercedes, it looked nondescript, just a scrubby hill on which someone had planted a makeshift cross, another parochial fetish in a place still agitated with piety. But something about it snagged my attention, made me feel uneasy, required I take another look. And so we turned the car around.

We were driving through what was now the northeastern corner of Poland, a country where frontiers marched back and forth to the abrupt commands of history. The same fields of green corn moving in slow waves with the rhythm of the breeze had been Lithuanian, Prussian, Russian, Polish. As the car ate up the kilometers between the old boating resort of Augustów and the medieval church town of Sejny, we seemed to be moving backward in time. Ploughs were drawn by horses. The same horses, big, lumbering high-cruppered chestnuts and bays, pulled carts packed with sunburned farm children along rutted roads and paths. The air smelled of cattle. A wide, white,

Simon Schama is Mellon Professor of Social Sciences at Harvard University. He is writing a book about landscape and memory.

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By STEVE TALLY

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early evening sky was neither troubled by the distant scream of jets nor punctured by pylons. Beside chimney pots, storks stood sentinel at their monstrously overbuilt nests, untidy citadels of twigs and branches. Every so often pairs of the birds, mates for life, would engage in noisy bouts of conjugal fencing, their lurid pink bills clacking against each other. And off to the east, a dark wall of forest, the most ancient in Europe, rose adamantly against the horizon.

I had come to Poland to see this forest. See what exactly, I wasn't sure. Historians are supposed to reach the past through texts, and occasionally through images: through things that are safely caught in the bell jar of academic convention. Look; don't touch. But one of my best-loved teachers, an intellectual hellraiser and a writer of eccentric courage, had always insisted on directly experiencing "a sense of place," of using "the archive of the feet."

My subject now was landscape, myth, and memory, and this woodland wilderness, the *puszcza* stretching all the way along the borderland that Poland shared with Belarus and Lithuania, was the "native realm" of writers of our time like Czeslaw Milosz, or of past time like Adam Mickiewicz. Generation after generation such writers had created a consolatory myth of a sylvan countryside that would endure uncontaminated, whatever disasters befell the Polish state. And with a swerve of logic that only connoisseurs of Polish history can appreciate, this sempiternal homeland was celebrated (in Polish) as "Lithuania."

> O Lithuania, my country, thou
> Art like good health, I never knew how precious
> Till I lost thee.

"Just imagine," said a friend, "you Americans singing 'Canada the Beautiful.'"

Unstable identities are history's prey. There was blood, I knew, beneath the verdure and tombs in the deep glades of oak and alder. The fields and forests and rivers had seen war and terror, elation and desperation, death and resurrection, Lithuanian kings and Teutonic knights, partisans and Jews, Hitler's Gestapo and Stalin's NKVD. It is haunted land, where children pick up great coat buttons from six generations of fallen soldiers, lying amidst the woodland mushrooms.

The car pulled up outside the porch of a handsome wooden Lithuanian church, its timbers the color of burnt umber, the roof surmounted by an onion-shaped cupola covered in gray slate. A brown garland of wheat hung slackly over the door. Families were beginning to arrive for evensong beneath flights of racing swallows. Small boys dragged their feet while their mothers pulled them into the church, holding bunches of blue meadow flowers—lupines and cornflowers—in their spare hand.

A hundred yards up the road and set back from it on a steeply rising embankment was the wooden cross, backlit by the six o'clock sunshine like a painting by Friedrich. Skeptical pilgrims in a land notorious for instant martyrologies, we approached the cross up a grassy slope, dotted with boulders, hundreds of them, standing on end like a congregation or a battalion guarding a holy way. Half way to the top we could read script on a small notice pinned to the cross. It told us that here, at Giby, in early 1945, hundreds of men and women accused of supporting the Polish Home Army were taken to their death by the NKVD.

The little hill had been given a fresh crown of yellow sand, on which rested rough-hewn slabs of polished granite. The stones were engraved with perhaps 500 names, listed alphabetically from A to Z, then beginning again with "A" names, as though someone, late at night, had clapped his hand to his head and said "Jesus Maria, what about Piotr and Jan and Marta!" and people for whom there was no last name and people for whom there was no first name. (Both kinds appeared on these gray slabs.) A single stone, at a remove from the rest, lay on its side amidst the boulders and declared that "they died because they were Poles."

Post-Communist Poland is full of such places—raw, chafing histories torn from decades of official silence yet still imperfectly recovered; markers freshly dug or posted. But the real shock waited at the top of the mound. For beyond the cross the ground fell sharply away to reveal a landscape of unanticipated beauty. A fringe of bright young trees marked the horizon floor, but at their back, like giants holding the hands of children, stood the black-green phalanx of the primeval forest. In the midground a silver ribbon of river, one of the many lakes and streams feeding into the course of the Niemen, wound through reedy marshes and fields of green corn. The windows of isolated timber cottages caught the sunset beside the edge of quiet ponds, where geese stood doing nothing very much.

"Behold," one could hear Mickiewicz declaim in his grandest rhetorical manner, "Lithuania." For this, surely, was the picture that filled his mind's eye in his Parisian exile.

> . . . bear off my yearning soul to roam
> Those little wooded hills, those fields beside
> The azure Niemen; spreading green and wide
> The vari-painted cornfields like a quilt,
> The silver rye, the wheatfields' gilt . . .

What filled my own field of vision formed the shape of a window or a painting, a rectangular space, composed of horizontally-layered scenery. Here was the homeland for which the Home Army men of Giby had died, and to which, in the shape of their memorial hummock, they had been added. Their memory had now assumed the form of the landscape itself. A metaphor had become a reality, an absence had become a presence.

Such grassy swellings—tumuli—were the first marks that man made upon the European landscape. Within such burial barrows, the bodies of the honored dead would be united with the earth that had produced them, freeing their spirits for the journey to another abode. Lithuania was the last pagan nation to be converted to Christianity, as late as the fourteenth century, and the ancient native tradition has endured by memorializing the nation's martyrs and heroes in the form of a *kopiec*, a grassy mound sometimes built from the ground up, sometimes added to the crown of a naturally-standing hill. On the outskirts of the ancient Polish capital of Kraków, another patriot son of Lithuania, Tadeusz Kościuszko, fallen in a doomed revolutionary struggle against Russia in the 1790s, is enshrined by just such a hill, unnaturally conical, constructed from soil said to have been carted from the hero's battlefields. Now it is a terraced beauty spot from which hand-holding lovers can survey the elegant old city wheezing in the polluted fumes from the Nowa Huta steelworks on its smoggy horizon. At the foot of the mound Kościuszko's sacred relics—a coat and a sword—hang in a shrine-like space within a toy fortress built by the Austrians.

Beneath the rocks of Giby, though, there is nothing but dirt. Some months earlier, in the nearby forest of Augustów, a mass grave had been found, surmised to be the place where the NKVD had executed an entire village for supporting the Polish Home Army rather than the Communists. Bodies were exhumed, but badges and buckles and boots had shown them to be German soldiers, deaths-head insignia appearing amidst the bones. Murderers murdered.

So the 500 of Giby are still ghosts in transit, dragged who knows where, disposed of in some Arctic ice-hole along with millions of other victims. But the village was determined to go through with its act of repatriation. The yellow sand at the foot of the little hill marking a track had been freshly added in preparation for a ceremony in a few weeks. And as sur-

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vivors' memories released more names, they, too, would be added to the granite slabs. There would, somehow, be a homecoming.

There was another population that once had also belonged to this landscape, and for that population homecomings were out of the question. For Poland's Jews headed for the charnel house, a view of the countryside had been blotted out by the shutters and nailed down slats of transport wagons clattering relentlessly toward the death camps. In our mind's eye, we are accustomed to think of the Holocaust as having no landscape, or at best a landscape emptied of features and color, shrouded in night and fog, blanketed by perpetual winter, collapsed into shades of dun and gray; the gray of smoke, of ash, of quicklime. It is shocking, then, to realize that Treblinka, too, belongs to a brilliantly vivid countryside, to the riverland of the Bug and the Vistula, rolling, gentle land lined by avenues of poplar and aspen. Its numberless graves, like the memorial at Giby, are marked by unworked standing stones.

I had always thought of the Jews of the Alte Land as essentially urban types, even when they lived in villages: tradesmen and artisans and tailors and carpenters and butchers and bakers, with the Rebbe as the lord of the shtetl—microcosms of the great swarming communities of Wilno and Bialystok and Mińsk. And so it often was. But the villages we walked through, these picture-perfect rustic cottages with their slanting timber eaves and their crook-fenced gardens, had once been Jewish houses. In some places Jews made up 70 percent of the population. So even if they had not worked the earth with their hands or cut hay in the fields, these Jews had been country people, no less than the villagers of the Cotswolds or the peasants of the Auvergne. And one group among them, people known to everyone in the border country of Poland and Lithuania, had even been people of the forest, of the wilderness *puszcza*.

Among them, somewhere, was my family. My mother's father Mark, who did become a butcher, left this region along with three brothers at the turn of the century, driven by the horseback terror of the Cossack pogroms. But his father Eli, like many other Jews, made his living cutting timber from the great primeval forests, hauling it to the tributaries that fed the Niemen, downstream from Grodno, and floating the logs to the old provincial city of Kowno. During the long Lithuanian winters the rivers were frozen, and he would transport the timber on long sleds, driven by big Polish farm horses. From Kowno or Wilno the lumber would be sold to the Russian railway companies for ties or freight wagons, or shipped further downstream to the Baltic for export, usually handled by other and grander Jewish timber companies.

Somewhere, beside a Lithuanian river, with a primeval forest all about it, stood my great grandfather Eli's house, itself made of roughly fashioned timber with a cladding of plaster, surrounded by a stone wall to announce its social pretensions. My mother, who was born and grew up in the yeasty clamor of London's East End, retains just the scraps and the shreds of her father's and uncle's memories of this landscape: tales of brothers fending off wolves from the sleds (a standard brag of the woodland taverns); of the dreamy youngest brother Hyman falling asleep at the loading depot and rudely awakened by being tied to a log and heaved into the river. "But where, exactly, Mother?" I wanted to know, for the first time in my life. "Kowno *gubernia* that's all we ever knew," she shrugged.

The history of the country only deepens the uncertainty. For "Lithuania" is not coterminous with the present borders of the shrunken Baltic republic, and still less with its language and religion. For centuries it covered an immense expanse of territory stretching all the way from the Black Sea in the south to the Bug River in the west to the Baltic in the north. In 1386 its hunter-king Jagiello

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married the Polish Queen Jadwiga, creating by their union the Great Polish realm. Over time the cultural identity of the south and the west of the country was colonized by Poland. Its landowning gentry came to speak and write Polish, and to call themselves by the Polish name of *szlachta*. In the late eighteenth century, Poland was brutally and cynically partitioned and the pieces devoured by its neighbors—the Prussians, the Russians, and the Austrians. The Lithuanian heartland became Russian, and its Polish-speaking poets came to think of it as the captive homeland.

With no formal frontiers to cross, itinerant Jewish traders migrated within the Russian Empire as family connections or economic incentives beckoned, north from the Ukraine or Belarus and south from Latvia, magnetized by the great center of piety and cultural passion in Wilno. My great-grandfather and his four boys, like so many other wood-shleppers, were in effect the outriders of this Judeo-Lithuanian world, by Yiddish standards real backwoodsmen, as at home with horses and dogs and two-handled saws as with prayer books and Shabbes candles. We drove further north from Giby, past synagogues with drunkenly undulating gables and whitewashed walls (the wooden structures having all been burned by the S.S. and their local collaborators), cutting through darker woodland dominated by spruce and pine. I remembered someone in a Cambridge common room pestering the self-designated "Non-Jewish Jew" and Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher, himself a native of this country, about his roots. "Trees have roots," he shot back, scornfully. "Jews have legs." And I thought, as yet another metaphor collapsed into ironic literalism, that some Jews have roots *and* legs, and branches and stems, too.

So when Mickiewicz hails "ye trees of Lithuania" as if they belonged only to the gentry and their serfs, to their foresters and gamekeepers, I could myself lay some claim, as the custodian of my family's memory, to those thick groves of birch and beech, alder and oak. I dare say that even the totem of Teuton and Slav, the lime tree, lay on Eli Steinberg's sleds and carts, waiting to be turned into the clogs and the sandals worn everywhere in the Lithuanian villages.

Notoriously, Jews and Gentiles did not share the Lithuanian woods as happy neighbors. From the time that they arrived in the region, fleeing from Bogdan Chelmnicki's murderous Cossacks in the middle of the seventeenth century, relations have been always paradoxical, sometimes painful. Neither the intense, often primitive fervor of Polish Catholicism nor the mysticism of Orthodoxy was auspicious for humanizing the Jewish presence. And to these two kinds of dangerous ecstasies, Judaism added its own benign kind in the form of Hassidism.

But neither was there unrelenting persecution. Mickiewicz's own attitudes to the Jews of his homeland were typically ambivalent. There is no doubt of his familiarity with them. He had been a teacher in Kowno itself, making him virtually my *landsmann*; and he must have known the Jewish timbermen and inn-keepers of the rural *gubernia* along the west bank of the Niemen. In 1832, following the collapse of the November uprising against the czar—the great catastrophe of his life—he wrote a gospel of national religion explicitly associating Poland's martyrdom with the Passion of Christ: *The Books of the Polish Pilgrimage* (translated into English by Kenneth Mackenzie). Book Fifteen features a Christian forester who declines a highwayman's invitation to pillage a local Jewish inn and kill its occupants and instead turns on the robber. Bleeding from his wounds, he goes to the Jews and asks their help in making sure the thief is put out of action. The Jews give him brandy and tend his wounds, but to his amazement they are full of querulous skepticism, and dubious about the story. They fear that the forester may demand payment for his protection, and protest it was not their job to clear the forest of robbers. Unable to make them comprehend his altruism, the forester walks off, groaning with pain, into the woods. "The Jews knew that he was grievously wounded and they felt that they had done ill but they wished to persuade themselves that they had done no ill. So they talked loudly, that they might deafen their consciences."

Mickiewicz's little parable is a classic item of Polish anti-Semitism, neither better or worse than the ancient Catholic tradition from which it obviously descended. Its Jews are stereotyped as callous, mean-minded unbelievers, impervious to the meaning of disinterested sacrifice and ignobly timorous to boot. Above all, these Hebrews huddled in their inn somewhere are made to appear out of place in their surroundings; they are a scenic anomaly.

All of which makes the presentation of the Jew in Mickiewicz's epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, just two years later in 1834, all the more astonishing. For although Jankiel is also an innkeeper, he is as much in his element in the countryside as the feudal barons, foresters, and peasants who populate Mickiewicz's story of Old Lithuania on the brink of the modern world. The same fox-fur hat and long coat that make the Jew conspicuously different in other stories now seem to be made from native fabric; the drink he brews is a miraculously potent and mysteriously delectable honey-mead. But what really naturalizes Jankiel is his music. Music is so important in *Pan Tadeusz* that it might as well have been a tone poem. It is as elaborately and as passionately described as the Lithuanian landscape, and it is always meant to speak of native feeling so powerful, so ancient, and so instinctive that it can hardly be communicated in any other form.

At the center of this story of two feuding dynasties is a great woodland hunt during which one of the many officials of the retinue, the "seneschal," plays on a bison horn, a call that echoes over and over again throughout the forest. Mickiewicz gives its sound a feral note, bonding together the men and the beasts, the hunters and their quarry, in a kind of primitive sylvan companionship. And at the very end of *Pan Tadeusz*, the warring Soplica and Horeszko families are abruptly reconciled by the sudden appearance of a Russian threat, and their reconciliation is crowned by the marriage of Tadeusz to Zhosia, uniting the clans—at which point Jankiel is asked by the bride to take out his *cymbaly*, the old Polish dulcimer, and play for the wedding. At first he refuses, but then is sweet-talked by Zhosia into consenting:

> He sat, and taking up the instrument,
> He looked at it with pride and deep content;
> As when a veteran hears his country's call,
> Whose grandsons take his sword down from the wall,
> And laughs: it's long since he has held the blade
> But yet he feels it will not be betrayed . . .

The Jew's dulcimer thus becomes a musical weapon, unsheathed to turn a wedding party into a patriotic communion.

Jankiel's performance becomes a musical history of Poland's sorrows and defiance, beginning with the Polonaise of the 3rd of May, the anthem of Kościuszko's revolution of 1794, then changing to a violent dissonance recalling the betrayal of the revolution at Targowica and the Russian intervention, and ending with the Dabrowski mazurka adopted by the Polish Legions fighting with the Napoleonic armies in the hope of a national resurrection

> that all the strings like brazen trumpets blared
> And from the trumpets to the heavens sped
> that march of triumph: *Poland is not dead!*

Jankiel finishes, exhausted by this patriotic consummation. "His floating beard majestically tipped / Upon his cheeks two strange red circles showed / And in his eye a youthful ardor showed . . ." With tears in his eyes, he

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greets General Dabrowski as if he were the awaited Messiah.

> He sobbed, the honest Jew
> He loved our country like a patriot true
> Dabrowski gave the Jew his hand to kiss
> And thanked him kindly for his courtesies . . .

It is difficult to imagine a more complete transformation. From being a figure that was an alien presence in the native land, Mickiewicz has made the Jew its ancestral embodiment, as natural a figure in the landscape as hunters and woodsmen.

The idea of the Yiddish Polonaise strummed on the dulcimer by Jankiel the patriot is not quite as bizarre as it seems. There was every reason for him to play the Polonaise of the 3rd of May, since that constitution had granted the Jews of Poland full civil and political rights. And when Kościuszko's troops faced the Russians in their hopeless resistance in 1794, the Warsaw National Guard included a Jewish regiment, commanded by Berek Joselewicz, the first Jewish company under arms since the Dispersion, something undreamed of by the French Revolution.

For Mickiewicz, dwelling amid the Polish diaspora in Paris, and possessed by spiritual and messianic visions, the Jewish and Polish experiences of exile and suffering were directly analogous. Perhaps they were even, in some dimly apprehended sense, providentially related. The poet peculiarly believed that Jewish emancipation and Jewish conversion were part of the same historical process that would usher in a new era. In this new sacred epoch, the converted Jews would take their place alongside their fellow Poles in a doubly redeemed homeland.

One of his closest friends was Armand Levy, a Polish Catholic of Jewish descent who became guardian of Mickiewicz's children after the poet's death in 1855 and who himself returned to his old faith. In 1845 Levy and Mickiewicz went together to the synagogue in the rue Neuve St. Laurent on Tisha B'Av, the fast day that commemorates the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and the second temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. And it was with Levy that Mickiewicz seems to have dreamed up the fantastic enterprise of the "Hussars of Israel."

The Crimean War gave him his opportunity. In this most serious war of the mid-nineteenth century, British and French troops came to the defense of the Ottoman Empire against Russia. On the principle that my enemy's enemy is my friend, the Polish émigrés planned to recruit a "Cossack" regiment to fight with the Ottoman army commanded by one Sadyk Pasha, formerly the Ukrainian

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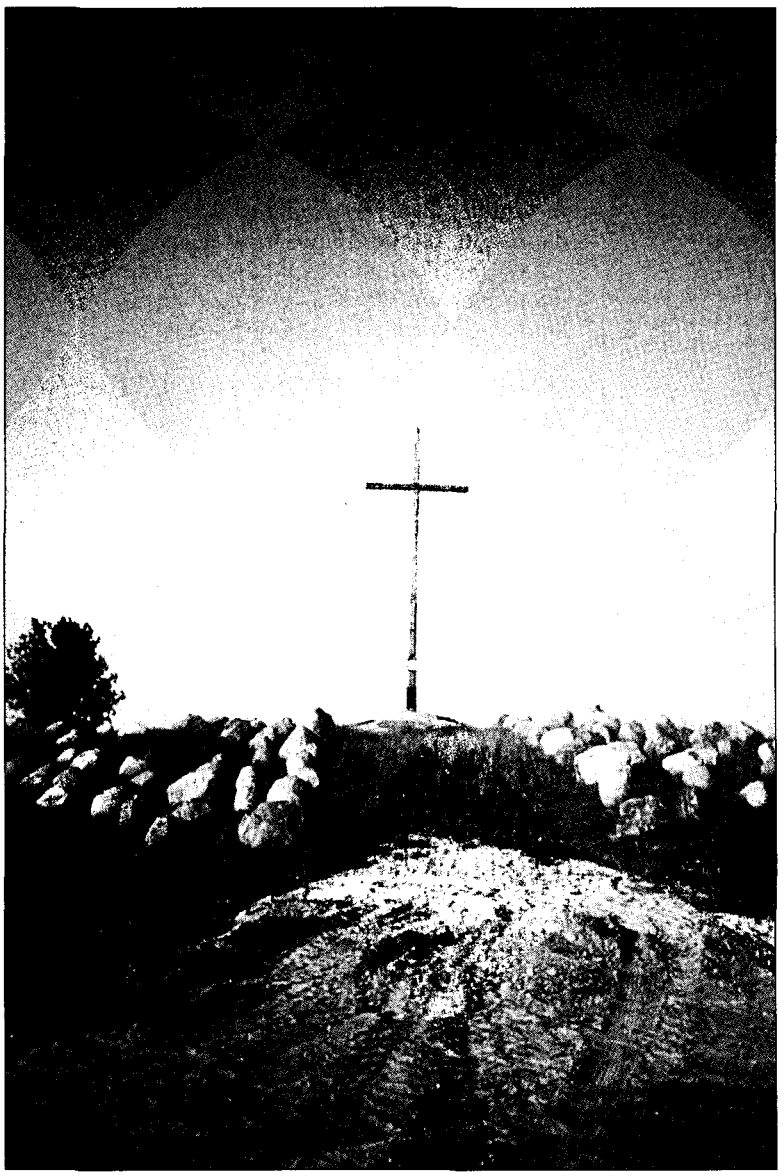
nobleman Michal Czaykowski. It was Mickiewicz's gloriously harebrained notion to expand this legion to include an explicitly "Hebraic" regiment, recruited partly from Polish Jews who had been forced to serve in the Russian army and been taken prisoner by the Turks, and partly from Ottoman Jewish volunteers themselves.

It was an extravagantly Polish fantasy, this dream of the Jewish-Polish-Turkish-Cossack, a thousand cavalrymen astride shiny black mounts, brilliantly outfitted in gold braid and shakoes, brandishing their sabers at the Russian hordes. Yet it was not any more lunatic, perhaps, than the visions of the Viennese Theodor Herzl forty years later, also of cavalrymen of Zion, of impeccably turned out Jewish martial equestrians. Of course it did not happen. There were a handful of Jewish volunteers among the "Cossack" regiment, but their commander Sadyk Pasha/Czaykowski continued to refer to "scurvy Jews," and the Turks themselves (not for the last time) imagined the Hussars to be the first step in an international Jewish conspiracy to take Palestine.

But on a Sabbath day in September, 1855, Mickiewicz and Levy went to another synagogue, this time in Izmir, the port city that the rest of the world knew as Smyrna. With an interpreter they went to see the local Haham or communal rabbi, and visited the synagogue for Sabbath services. Again the poet was profoundly moved. Black silk gowns and candlelight flickering against the walls transported him at once to his lost, beloved Lithuania. The Sephardi melodies, the food stuffed with dried figs and apricots and perfumed with cinnamon and rosewater, the divans covered with silk and tapestry made no difference at all. Izmir, he said, was the image of a Jewish Lithuanian town: Kowno-in-Levant.

Quite mad, of course—except that my father's father's family lived in Izmir when my mother's father's family lived in Kowno. As far as I know, none of the Schamas or the Steinbergs became Cossacks, though my mother swears we had a circus rider who tamed wild horses (though never on Shabbes). I had been to Izmir many years ago, but never to Kowno. But now it is Kaunas, not the "Lithuania" of Mickiewicz's *patria* but the Baltic Lithuanian republic, with its own non-Slavic tongue. Though my visa was for Poland it might be possible, I thought, to cross the frontier. We were cautioned, however, that getting back was an altogether different proposition, that we would have to take our place in the three-day line waiting to migrate through Poland and westward on to the fleshpots of E.C. capitalism; and I had to be in Kraków in two days.

So Kowno itself would have to remain a tantalizing distance away. But to be in my grandfather's landscape, in timbered Lithuania, I did not need to cross any borders at all. When I stood on the mound at Giby, I was already there. Still, I hungered for some familiar name, scanned the map of the frontier country for something that echoed. And at its very northeastern tip, two miles from the border itself, was a place marked "Punsk." What was it my mother had said about the place the brothers went for the logs, as she fretted about ancient enemies, about Cossacks, Poles, Nazis, and NKVD, lurking in the woods. Could the place the brothers went to fetch logs have been Punsk? No, too far south. But it was something like that...



Photograph by author

THE MOUND AT GIBY

It would be a detour, but then this whole expedition to a Poland that was once a Lithuania had been a detour. And I had always liked that word *meandering*, its snaking run of syllables flowing who knows where. So we pointed the car back north, and the countryside opened up into rolling hills, cultivated fields, the forest still pursuing us darkly at the skyline.

Whatever it was once, Punsk is now a Lithuanian town. Polish is spoken to strangers, the Baltic tongue among its people. When Vilnius was being intimidated into temporary submission by Soviet troops in 1990, an office of the Lithuanian independence movement Sajudis was established in Punsk, and the overgrown village became a main transit point for donations of food, clothes, and money crossing the border. Some of the children, hurrying to their confirmation service at the twin-spired church, were dressed in the standard Eastern European miniature ball gowns and bridal dresses. But others wore ethnic Lithuanian costume, with green and red embroidered pillbox hats and short green jackets. We asked, and there was neither embarrassment or hesitation. "Over there," said a stout man in front of the church, and pointed to a row of solid cottages with overhanging gables and fenced yards lining the main street. "All Jewish

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properties. Not now, no Jews now."

There had to be a Jewish cemetery, and there was. Hands waved us in the general direction, but we drove out of the village more than once vainly searching the streets before we realized that it might have been located much further way. The old Mercedes followed a street until it became a dirt road, then a farm track. We found ourselves at the edge of a wheat field, the car's wheels spinning crazily in a deep tractor-tread rut. Bogdan the driver gunned the engine savagely and careened through the field to descend again to a metalled path. And beyond the snarling and the smoke of scorched rubber, there it was: a crumbling gray stone wall attempting to contain an acre or so of trees and long unmowed grass. Behind the wall the ground rose in a gentle slope. It was a burial mound.

Inside the enclosure what had looked like grass turned out to be a solid carpet of dandelions, packed so thickly that they formed a rippling, deep-pile meadow, perhaps a foot-and-a-half tall, catching the light through the trees in dancing speckled patterns. It took a while to see any sign of stones at all, but close to the top of the little hill one or two markers stuck out from the undergrowth at crazy angles. Was this all? Were these the generations of Jewish Punsk? Had the Nazis or even the Lithuanians ripped out the stones as they had throughout the "Generalgouvernement" in Poland?

It was only by crushing the dandelions underfoot that I could feel something other than soft-packed dirt. I knelt down and parted the stalks and leaves. I brushed away the fuzz of their seedballs. Two inches of grizzled stone appeared, the Hebrew lettering virtually obliterated by heavy growths of tawny and mustard-colored lichen. I could just make out the Hebrew letters, Tet, Bet, Yud, Hay, and a name, Tevye. Tevye? I sat and swept my arms about in the dandelions like a child making a snow angel. Another stone appeared, and then another. And digging down a few inches brought still another up from the netherworld. I could have spent a day with a shovel and shears exposing an entire world, the subterranean universe of the Jews of Punsk.

But to what end? I thought of my father, looking stoically out at Hampstead Heath and reverting to cricket metaphors before he died: "When you've had your innings, you've had your innings." The tombs themselves were being buried, sliding gently and irrevocably into their companiable mound as verdant Lithuania rose to reclaim them. The headstones that had been lovingly cut and carved were losing any sign that human hands had wrought them. They were becoming a geological layer—a landscape.

I lay down and stared through the branches at the blue beyond, listened to the elms and the poplars whispering an indistinct Kaddish. I remembered that once there was a Lithuania and no Jews, and for that matter no Christians either; and then there were Jews, and some of them lived about the wood and took it to the rivers and the towns; and now again there are no Jews. But the forest still stands. Perhaps Deutscher was right, I thought. Trees have roots, Jews have legs. So I walked away from the mound at Punsk. •

The Art of Piety

BY ANDREW DELBANCO

The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers by Stephen J. Stein

(Yale University Press, 554 pp., $40)

It is difficult late in this century to think coherently about religious enthusiasm. After Jonestown and the Ayatollah and the Reverend Swaggart and the Reverend Bakker, it has become a vaguely distasteful subject periodically discredited by new instances of fervor turned to foul purposes. But good writing about religion has always been self-conscious about the ineffability of its subject. Since most pietistic sects are deliberately remote from the world, accounts written from the outside, hostile or friendly, tend to be abstract and unconvincing. It is not unusual to encounter, especially in academic books, the stylistic equivalent of a nervous laugh—snickering portraits of credulous people who hear disembodied voices and are treated as symptoms produced by some disorder of the larger culture.

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I suspect that this sort of writing signifies not so much a refined Enlightenment skepticism as a worry that the writer may not quite grasp, at least not with an initiate's conviction, the experience he is writing about. The problem can be evaded, of course, by making religious history a part of theological or ecclesiastical history—by turning it into a story of ideas and institutions. Yet in such a conventional perspective the human subjects tend to disappear; and even the best practitioners, drifting back to search for them, seem unable to resist having a little fun at their expense. Thus we learn from one respected scholar about the "Perfectionists," young women and men in western New York who sought during the 1820s to prove their sanctification by "bundling" with each other without reaching orgasm. They prospered until two couples (excluding the husband of one of the women) who were experimenting with *coitus reservatus* were interrupted by the husband's return. Assuming that he had been cuckolded, or was about to be, he went after one of the young men with a horsewhip, and then he was suddenly struck blind.

This incident, which was naturally interpreted by members of the sect as a miraculous intervention, was recently presented by Harold Bloom in his book on *The American Religion* as worthy of Edward Gorey. Bloom is right. American religious history is rich in slapstick vignettes. But behind the variety show—from the barking and the shrieking of the Methodists to the pious silence of the Quakers—there was a shared aspiration that many modern writers have found peculiarly hard to grasp. And so our major intellectuals, with the invaluable exception of William James, have stood on the sidelines and watched with outrage or amusement. Emerson, despite his own belief that there was spiritual value in many different human ambitions, spoke derisively of "the monstrous absurdities of the Methodists," of their "jumping about on all fours, imitating the barking of dogs and surrounding a tree in which they pretended they had '*treed Jesus.*'" And a century later Edmund Wilson recounted with an audible chuckle that John Humphrey Noyes, another New Yorker and founder of the utopian community at Oneida, empowered his Central Committee to regulate matings—a system that came under attack from "younger members, who complained that Noyes and his elders ... made a practice of assigning themselves the most desirable of the young girls." According to most authorities, old and new, antebellum America was a place filled with people waiting for the end, and eager to make the best of it.

The Shakers have not usually seemed to fit into this randy scene. After visiting one of their villages, Emerson called it a "Protestant monastery," and one convert (who eventually apostasized) described joining the society as becoming "an *Eunuch* for the kingdom of heaven's sake." The Shakers dressed their women in drab dresses and white bonnets, performed sexually segregated dances that make square-dancing look lewd, and gave to the world the wholesome recipes and the chaste furniture by which they are now chiefly known.

Like the Puritans, to whom they were theologically related, they were named not by themselves, but by their detractors. Their name was an abbreviation of "Shaking Quakers," a description that seems odd given their modern reputation for tranquility and repose. But in the eighteenth century, when it was first used, it made a certain contemptuous sense, since "shaking and singing, hopping and turning ... groaning and laughing" were conspicuous features of their ecstatic prayer meetings. In 1769, more than half a century earlier than the Mormons and the other perfectionists with whom they tend to be compared, the Shakers were founded by "Mother" Ann Lee, wife of a Manchester blacksmith who probably abused her, and with whom she had several children who died in infancy. As a child she is said to have admonished her own parents against "fleshly cohabitation of the sexes"—a crusade she resumed when, soon after their emigration to America in 1774, she and her husband separated and she committed herself to celibacy.

Stephen J. Stein's book about the Shakers is remarkably free of tendentiousness and has a fidelity to detail that makes it less a conventional denominational history than an act of devotion. Unfortunately, Stein is reticent about making connections between Ann Lee's dissident community as it evolved from "a roving band of charismatics into a communitarian society with many villages from Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, to New York, Massachusetts, and Maine," and the larger culture that surrounded it. For historians who would integrate the Shakers into a general account of nineteenth-century America, there exists an apparent contradiction between their ideal of chastity and the sexual adventurousness of other groups. Even in the view of a temperate scholar like Stein, whose book is a kind of obituary—dignified, a little melancholy, but mainly grateful for their having lived—the Shakers emerge as frantically anxious about sensual indulgence.

They seem to shrink from the fecundity of the world. Their "Millennial Laws," which were codified in the 1820s, excluded from their diets raw fruit and fresh-baked bread as overly stimulating, and by the 1840s the laws were toughened to ensure that "sisters must not mend, nor set buttons on brethren's clothes, while they have them on." Suspicious outsiders thought that they were secretive and devious. They charged that Ann Lee beat the genitals of believers in what Stein calls a "frenzied act of ascetic discipline" that cannot be ruled out as actually having occurred. It was even said that her followers "castrated all their males."

And yet, at the same time that the Shakers were rumored to emasculate one another, it was also said that they "stripped and danced naked in their night meetings, blew out the candles, and went into a promiscuous debauch." There was an unwitting insight, I think, in these charmingly inconsistent charges of sexual mutilation and fully-equipped debauchery—a clue to the common aspiration of many of the antebellum sects, to their almost carnal desire to feel the flesh melt in the purifying inferno promised by Scripture. Such was the contagion of desire that John Greenleaf Whittier, a Quaker himself, witnessed in the "wild, awe-stricken faces" of "thronging thousands" in Boston in the 1840s, that were

> turned ... in hourly expectation of the down-rushing of the fiery mystery of the Apocalypse; waiting with trembling eagerness and "not unpleasing horror" to behold ... the tremendous pageant before which the elements shall melt and the heavens flee away—the Baptism of the World in fire!

There have always been, and there still are, Americans who long for these flames and expect them soon. In the seventeenth century, millenarian prophecy was a conventional element of virtually everyone's religious education. In the eighteenth century, it merged with more worldly resentments and helped to foster political revolution. By the nineteenth century, it had been modulated into a rationalist idea of progress, and its older literal form became an eccentricity, though never a marginal one. Even as Enlightenment rationalism constricted the symbolism of religion—the doctrines of inheritable sin and the Trinity became superstitions to many educated people, the Book of Revelation became poetry—the need for spiritual assurance did not abate. Foundations of identity were becoming less and less secure.

The revolution had dissolved long-standing lines of authority and (as Gor-

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don Wood has recently shown) left the symbolism of hierarchy in tatters. Within fifty years, the fantastic expansion of the settled country was creating a whirlwind—some called it temptation, others opportunity—from which every family and every traditional community was an insecure shelter. Canals and railroads broke through the old barriers between regions; towns became cities, cities became metropolises.

It was in the midst of these transformations that the new sects—Owenites, Fourierites, Finneyites, and many more—proliferated, some religious, others secular, in their redemptive fever. Something similar had happened two centuries earlier in England when the feudal order broke down and religious radicalism took a part in the Civil War; and again in America in the mid-eighteenth century, during the upheavals known as the Great Awakening, when churches throughout the colonies split into New-Light and Old-Light factions. Such resurgences of sectarianism seem to cluster around moments of fundamental social realignment, when the whole culture lurches toward modernity, and some people, averting their eyes, desperately hold back.

The Shakers, in this context, were not distinct as a reclusive group focused on a beatific future, whose spiritual regimen amounted to a kind of rehearsal for the end: "If you will take up your crosses," Ann Lee taught, "against the works of generation, and follow Christ in the regeneration, God will cleanse you from all unrighteousness." One reason that Stein's book has a memorial tone is simply that it is hard for any group that lasts more than a generation to concentrate unflaggingly on apocalypse. (This is the same problem faced by the environmental movement in our own time, not only in the United States but in the entire developed West.) The collective life of any group dedicated to preparing for, or averting, apocalypse involves the conservation of a faith that once had visceral immediacy. Waiting for the end taxes credulity. After too many deferrals, expectancy subsides.

The Shakers' faith, like that of many pioneer sectarians, was magical at first. According to tradition, they proclaimed themselves a holy community on the "Dark Day" in 1780 when the sun was mysteriously obscured (an event "unnerving," as Stein says, to "a people given to apocalyptic reflections"). Chronicling "Mother" Ann's miraculous cures of the sick, the early Shaker texts claim her not merely as a visionary teacher, but as the fulfillment of Christ himself. Redemptive history, as the Shaker theologians understood it, was incomplete without the incarnation of a female savior "anointed and chosen of God, to reveal the mystery of iniquity, and to stand as the first in her order, to accomplish the purposes of God, in the restoration of that which was lost by the transgression of the first woman, and to finish the work of man's final redemption." God was a male-female duality, and Ann Lee, according to Shaker doctrine, was the incarnated female half of this bifurcated God. She was to Christ as Eve was to Adam, the fulfillment of the second creation.

Courtesy Hancock Shaker Village

FIVE SHAKER WOMEN

First in a succession of female Shaker leaders (at the turn of the century her mantle was passed to a New-England-born woman named Lucy Wright), Ann Lee also inspired followers outside the sect. Drawn by her personal example, a magnetic young woman named Jemima Wilkinson toured the country in the 1780s proclaiming her own version of salvation, claiming that she had died and been resurrected. She wore male clothing under a flowing robe and called herself the "public universal friend." Since we are limited to scattered comments, often by skeptical bystanders, it is difficult fully to apprehend the effect of such extraordinary women. It seems clear that there was enchantment in their mixture of gentleness and power, and that their followers felt an infectious serenity in their voices and in their physical touch. Incorruptible mothers, these women were stern but compassionate, rigid but pendant.

What Ann Lee and her disciples seemed to understand was the persistent undercurrent of woman-worship in American religious life. It was an impulse that had been dormant, but never dead, since the days of the Puritan dissident Anne Hutchinson. Reawakened in the nineteenth century by such charismatic women as the itinerant black preacher Sojourner Truth, and later by Mary Baker Eddy, this was a phenomenon that captivated some of our most alert intellectuals. Hawthorne, who found "everything [in the Shaker village at Hancock, Massachusetts] so neat that it was a pain and constraint to look at it," composed *The Blithedale Romance* around a mysterious woman named Zenobia who has a hypnotic effect on the members of a utopian community loosely modeled on Brook Farm. Later in the century, when the nation was rife with female mediums who communicated publicly with spirits of the dead, Henry James picked up the theme of the mesmerizing woman in *The Bostonians*, and identified as an American obsession this unarticulated longing that only the forgiving woman can satisfy.

It is not surprising, I think, that for observers hostile to what they regarded as this fawning before women (one

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Shaker brother was expelled in 1799 for protesting that "men that are willing to have a woman to rule over them are fools") the Shakers seemed a domestic "species of Roman Catholicism," whose theology was more of Mary than of Christ. Their gender relations were egalitarian, if not matriarchal. Their "theologians," Stein writes, "defined Ann Lee as an agent of redemption, of equal, if not greater, importance in salvation history than Jesus of Nazareth."

Yet their discipline was valued by many conventional Christians outside the sect: by parents who sent their children to them to be educated, by consumers who found relief for "flesh and mind" in their medicines and herbs and, by the mid-nineteenth century, in such marketed and advertised remedies as oils that would restore the faded color of grayed hair. They were also a kind of child rescue agency, to whom orphans and intractable adolescents could be dispatched. They organized themselves into units called "families" and accommodated guests for meals and lodging, requiring married visitors to observe the rule of sexual separation. Converts had to commit all their worldly resources to collective ownership; and so their economic viability depended in part on their function as a sort of spa for visitors worn by the world. At a time when the doctrine of original sin was failing as a justification for sternness in child-rearing, and the mobility and instability of families grew apace, the Shakers represented an attractive institutionalization of motherhood for a culture that no longer quite knew what a mother's responsibilities were. Thus they played an important part in the ongoing American discussion (ongoing as late as the presidential campaign of 1992) about the nature of true motherhood. The Shaker "family"—ascetic, disciplined, with all traces of sexuality expunged—represented an antidote to the prevalent fears of the time: fear of the mob, of immigrant aliens, of freed men and restless slaves. Among these threatening novelties were unruly women who were stepping out into the public sphere and taking up, with what seemed to some an insatiable fury, the causes of temperance and anti-slavery and other radical reforms.

Shaker "mothers" were different. They knew their place. They were airless and reclusive and, with respect to children, utterly devoted to the quiet work of nurture. To be sure, there was, within the Shakers' maternal benignity, a hint of menace—as if they were sirens dissembling as nannies. Like the Masons and the Catholics and the Jews, they incurred suspicion as a secret society, a distrust they did not discourage by their contempt for the world. During the revolutionary war, they were disliked for their pacifism and charged with loyalty to the crown. They were regularly accused of kidnapping children; in the mid-nineteenth century a play called "The Shaker Lovers" drew good crowds in Boston with its portrayal of two young lovers held against their will by an elder who was both a zealot and a "voluptuary."

As commercial links grew between the Shaker enclave and the outside world, its history, like that of most religious movements, became the tale of a people's efforts to keep alive the image of their irreproachable founders—a story of decline from effusions of faith to codified rules and catechistic instruction. The old ways receded. By the beginning of the twentieth century, some Shakers kept personal bank accounts. Electricity and telephones were introduced into the villages, and automobiles soon followed. Their brick and clapboard houses were renovated into Victorian mansions complete with porches and cupolas. The mustard-colored stain (which in most of the restored villages can now only be seen on the inside of cabinets and drawers) was covered over by a more elegant mahogany tone.

Stein, who wants to resist the paradigm of declension, tells the Shakers' story as one punctuated by revivals that broke through accumulations of doctrine and retrieved the original spirit of simple piety. But the pressures of modernity were impossible to resist. The manufacture of furniture became, in effect, an export business. By the 1870s, chairs were being mass-produced at the rate of two dozen a day; a decade later furniture parts were being purchased from outside suppliers. In the 1850s Hawthorne marveled at the plaster "smooth as marble" on the walls of Shaker houses; fifty years later in some of the more prosperous villages the floor planks cut from yellow pine were being overlaid with marble.

As a celibate community, the Shakers faced, of course, a more basic problem. They needed to find a way not only to perpetuate the founders' simplicity and self-sufficiency, but also to perpetuate themselves. New Shakers could not be born, they could only be made—that is, converted. In this respect the Shakers were encountering the difficulty that besets any religious community that rejects the idea of inheritable citizenship or membership conferred by sacrament, and that demands instead evidence of spiritual authenticity from every prospective communicant. Public testimony—of one's commitment to celibacy, one's surrender of personal property, one's acceptance of the gospel of Mother Ann—was a requirement for joining the Society.

For the Shakers, as for many other Protestant denominations, this public renunciation of the worldly self lay at the heart of the conception of the church as a voluntary gathering of mutually edifying believers. It is, in its essence, an unteachable ritual, and it has nothing to do with the transmission of tradition. It must rise up anew within each believer's heart. The transformation of the self, as the Shakers understood it, is founded not on the accumulation of experience, but on its obliteration. Each generation of converts must rediscover the truth of Mother Ann, who is not so much a teacher as an exemplar, whose gospel is unchanging and unimprovable. This commitment to holy replication is the keynote of Shaker life.

Thus Shaker piety was an extreme form of a religious style that persists in many versions as a dissent from modernity, whose mood in America has always been prospective. Among the Shakers the most eloquent expression of this anti-modernism was not their covenants or doctrines or rituals, but their craftsmanship. Its manifest beauty has been recognized even by those who have found their ideas and style of living stagnant or obdurate. Some, like Hawthorne, regarded them as perverse in "their utter and systematic lack of privacy; the close function of man with man ... [which is] hateful and disgusting to think of"; but the grace and the dignity of their artifacts has rarely been disputed. Even the banister on a Shaker staircase is a functional and aesthetic marvel—the spindles turned with exquisite precision on the lathe so that they have, like columns on a Greek temple, a delicate entasis that looks like perfection to the eye. After a century and a half of believers and tourists clambering up and down the stairs, there is no sway in the newel.

Such a construction, never casual or merely efficient, was truly an act of worship. A similar devotion to ascetic form may be sensed, though rarely matched, in the modernist adaptation of the aesthetic of functional simplicity. This was an aesthetic of ferocious concentration—not merely fastidious, but offended by the very idea of ornament as a distraction and a beguilement of the eye. Shaker workmanship was driven by the same impulse that drove soldiers of Puritanism to roam England destroying stained-glass windows—not an act of vandalism, as Perry Miller used to say, but an act of aesthetic criticism. The point was to eliminate opacity and admit God's light.

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Stein is understandably fatigued by all the attention that Shaker craftsmanship has lately attracted. He has had enough of coffee-table books and earnest documentaries, and he begins his book by quoting one of the last surviving Shakers ruefully predicting that she will "be remembered as a chair or table." In 1990, we learn, Oprah Winfrey spent $220,000 for a pine work counter. Excellently suited for the taste of the '90s, the Shaker style promises expiation for the conspicuous consumption of the '80s and reminds us of our culture's genius for appropriating dissident language and turning it into cant: one can now assemble "Shaker" chairs from kits, and purchase "Shaker" baskets that are manufactured in the People's Republic of China. And yet it has been precisely this commercialization, at which the purists shudder, that has saved the Shakers from the oblivion of the other short-lived sects that sprouted with them in the antebellum years. It is, in its way, homage from the outside world.

In 1965 the ministry at Canterbury, New Hampshire, made the decision to close the membership of the last Shaker communities. Fought within the Society, the elders' decision has led to a schism with the other surviving community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, which continues, with dubious authority, to welcome newcomers into its family. The quarrel looks like a classic break between the ecclesiastical center and a congregation at the local periphery—a pattern that runs through the history of every Protestant denomination in the United States. But its circumstances remain murky, since the surviving Shakers (the last member at Canterbury died last month at the age of 96; nine now remain at Sabbathday Lake) have been reticent even with the tactful Stein. Some say the choice to close the covenant arose from fear that some treasure-hunting imposter would join for a time, outlive the last guardians of the faith, and then fall upon the wealth of the Society and abscond with it. Others say it was a response to an alarming rise in inquiries from ragged youth in the sixties, who threatened to turn the Shaker village into health-food communes where chastity would be a likely casualty.

In any case, the Shaker ranks are virtually depleted now, and Stein's brave endorsement of one sister's view that "our religion was started by God; [and] God will see it continues in some way" seems more a sentiment than a judgment. For most Americans, the word *Shaker* has become an adjective—like Windsor and Eames and Breuer—that modifies the word *chair*. Most of the assets of the Society have been converted into a trust to support the maintenance of the village museums, where one may go to recover something of the Shakers' immunity to the swirl of history, and of what Stein calls their "collective spiritual play." These places are haunted by images of severe but unresentful women, and of men whose faces are not quite frozen in childhood but not quite overwritten by experience. Immaculate, pampered by their curators, they are nevertheless ghostly places where one cannot shake the feeling that to retrieve the modulated passion of their people becomes every day less possible. The Shakers have become antiques.

ANDREW DELBANCO is at work on a book about evil and the American imagination.

The Acid Test

BY ROGER ROSENBLATT

Sailor Song by Ken Kesey

(Viking, 471 pp., $23.50)

A moment in Tom Wolfe's "On the Bus" comes rushing like a flaming flamingo: Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters are noising across America in their stupid, drug-fueled, day-glo, mantra-rapping, strobe-lit 1939 International Harvester school bus, when they pull up in Houston at the home of Larry McMurtry, who shyly emerges with his little boy at his side. Spotting the freaks, he is naturally confused, but he is also naturally good-natured, until a character whom Wolfe calls Stark Naked, because she is, leaps from the bus and scoops up McMurtry's little boy, shrieking, "Frankie! Oh Frankie! My little Frankie!" McMurtry, desperate to believe that he is

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still living on Planet Earth, touches her on the shoulder and stammers, "Ma'am! Ma'am! Just a minute, ma'am!"

You know this sort of moment. You are suddenly flung into the company of lunatics who like you, and you are strung between wanting to be with it and praying that these people will blow up. If you do not know this sort of moment, read *Sailor Song*. It is Ken Kesey's first novel in twenty-eight years. May he wait twenty-eight more.

They were hardly great books, but there was something good and good-hearted in Kesey's first two novels, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), and so I wanted to like the new one. The '60s are so easily trashable these days. It would be nice to think of Kesey as one of the rhinestones in the trash. But he, or rather his writing, makes critical kindness impossible. The new novel is plotless and idealess and pointless in its overflow of parables, anecdotes, and caricatures. But that is not what transforms the reader's disappointment into sadness. It's the suspicion, born long before this book appeared but amply confirmed by it, that Kesey could have been a pretty good writer-writer, but chose instead to be a culture-writer.

A writer-writer writes to be read. A culture-writer writes to be oohed. The distinction may be vividly illustrated by the career of Norman Mailer, who made a Kesey-like choice many years ago. After *Harlot's Ghost*, *Ancient Evenings*, and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, after the Hamptons movie, the T.V. boxing, the bullying, and the interminable parties, all that remains is the spectacle of a diabolically energetic show-off so desperate to be noticed that he will never be recognized. But if you go back to *The Naked and the Dead*, or further back to a short story Mailer wrote at the age of 18 called "The Greatest Thing in the World," there is a writer-writer, raw but real. The pressure on writer-writers to become culture-writers has never been greater, and neither has the interest of the media in what used to be the literary world; and so more and more literary figures are becoming entertainers. And bad ones.

What is Kesey's new novel about? I'll try. It is set in the future, in the Alaskan fishing village of Kuinak, where the DEAPS (Descendents of Early Aboriginal Peoples) abound. As do the LOUD (Loyal Order of the Underdogs, who cry "woof"), Alice Carmody, the Angry Aleut ("she's always got to go against the grain"), and the hero, Ike Sallas, "the Bakatcha Bandit," so-called for some unclear valiant activity during the environmental wars of the 1990s. (Don't ask.) Why Alaska? "Because Alaska is the end, the finale, the Last Ditch of the Pioneer Dream." Into the midst of these pranksters sails a ship owned by a Hollywood movie company led by a mogul named Gerhardt Steubins, seeking to make a film of *The Sea Lion*, a children's book written by somebody named Ken Kesey. Then lots of things happen, I think. The movie-makers are so hot for their project, they murder a few Kuinakians, while Ike the hero seems to be off in pursuit of a drug-dealer. In the end the village explodes in an apocalypse that has to do with electricity, and everyone chants the word "Squid."

In a recent *Esquire*, Kesey wails that East Coast critics will never understand him, while drawing on the supportive authority of, uh, Mailer. But the critics are not incorrect, except in their patience. For Kesey, again, made the choice of the culture-writer in taking encouragement from the wrong muses. His fiction is full of the kind of material that used to belong to the new journalism. This material is readily recognizable on several levels, the most accessible of which is style. Style to the culture-writer is not writing, but a kind of animated macho typing. Here is a characteristic passage from *Sailor Song*:

> "Folks, the great Gerhardt Steubins!" A very old man with pewter-grey hair and black eye patch stepped into the room's silent gape. If Ike had hoped to find some sinister foreign mastermind at the center of this glitzy web, he was vastly disappointed; this mastermind had a drawl from the Ozarks and a grin like what was left from a baked Virginia ham. The internationally famous Gerhardt Luther Steubins was a big, turkey-necked shambler from the All-American South. Ike imagined that in his prime he had probably carried another couple dozen pounds of working muscle on that gnawed frame, but the old man still looked amazingly fit. The tan arms were still cabled and the gnarly hands looked like they'd seen a lot of rough use.

Such prose is busy dazzling itself with itself, which has the effect of keeping the reader out of the novel, the way people sometimes tell funny stories to keep other people at a distance: the laughter makes a wall. No wonder Kesey is so transparently worried about how the critics will receive him; he is them. His writing screams its own insecurity. Its intent is mainly to impress. Vitality is supposed to do the work of intelligence. Color is allowed to stand in for coherence. Above all, this is the sort of prose that prides itself on its own absence of discipline. Kesey is hardly the only contemporary American writer not to understand that it requires great discipline to seem undisciplined.

But the errors of the culture-writer are more than matters of style. He mistakes invention for imagination, and he adopts craziness as a view of the world. The first of these errors leads him to believe that bizarrerie is sufficient for art. Invent some wacky, improbable, unheard of person, language, or circumstance, and that will do it. (The influence in recent decades of "magical realism" has only made the situation worse.) Think of it this way. Invention in literature is like building a house starting with the [illegible]. Imagination begins at the hearth, usually something quite simple and recognizable in human experience. From that core it may sprout wings, beaks, and flames, but the reader is always drawn to, and by, the core.

The culture-writer's most serious error, however, lies in his sense of life. He comes to see human experience as essentially wild and crazy. Whether he is led to this view by style and invention, or whether style and invention are the products of the view, the result is a literature that sees the world as purposeless and freakish. This is something much less strict and serious than irrationalism. Of such writing one does not ask, "What is here?" What is here is painfully obvious. One asks instead, "What is missing?" And what is missing are recognizable human conflicts and the thoughts and feelings of people one cares for. The collapse of such writing into mere effects is no surprise: this is literature that has lost touch with everything but itself.

The neglect of such fundamentals is owed, I think, to fear—the fear of appearing plain and unattractive. That fear in turn is fueled by a mistrust of the reader, who is not relied upon to take the time to appreciate the beauty in a simple story or a simple theme. Art thus becomes a window of opportunity rather than a window on life. Instead of living according to his own sense of time, the culture-writer produces prose for busy people. The only part of the reader that such a writer wishes to capture is his or her attention. And that is best done by making a noise.

Again, to be fair to Kesey, the world of the past few decades has justified such an assumption. We live in a culture that has a horror of a lack of publicity. The private life is scorned, except insofar as it furnishes the material for a public life. This may be good news for talk show hosts, but it is bad news for writers, for surely privacy is what makes writing writing. It is all very unpublic business, the work of the writer-writer. The work of the culture-writer is that of the public relations man. The irony, of course, is that the culture-writer is so eager to be fused with his times that

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he is likely to disappear with them. And so Kesey is as good as forgotten now. He also had the bad luck of being aided and abetted in his wrong choice by his readers, specifically by the '60s young who seized upon the celebration of anarchy in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and passed over the book's older and richer theme, which had to do with the conflict of good with evil. Kesey, too, went with anarchy. The kids of the '60s saw anarchy as what Kesey himself believed in, and eventually Kesey seemed to agree.

But between *Cuckoo's Nest* and the Merry Pranksters' ride came the writing of *Sometimes a Great Notion*. This was a book to reckon with, a morality tale as basically simple as *Cuckoo's Nest* and elephantine in the style of Wolfe (Thomas, not Tom), but clearly the work of a writer living and struggling inside his subject. You did not have to buy the story of the Stamper brothers or their battle (Kesey must have been the only counterculture writer to pit his heroes *against* the unions) to recognize a serious, private strain in the author. Love nature, trust your instincts, drop out, tune in: he was vulgarizing the old nineteenth-century message of Transcendentalism, but even in its vulgar form it seemed to have an authentic life in him. He was working something out for himself. He did not scream for attention; he was overheard.

It's amazing how much damage a single bus can do. Kesey's bus ruined him, as nature became electrified and instincts became laced with LSD and mescaline. True, he entertained millions. Kesey has always had a way of tugging at one's affection and admiration. There is no denying that within the antics and the books there are unmistakable traces of a good man wrestling for his soul. Even in the swamps and polar wastes of *Sailor Song* one feels the presence of an honorable searcher for "truth." The search is still touching. The writing, however, is empty, and it leaves the reader empty. That is what happens when a writer allows himself to be owned by a moment. In the end he has to shout louder and louder to be heard, and *Sailor Song* is precisely such a shout. In the *Last Supplement* to *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, Kesey wrote, "O kkkk, I think I've got it." But it got him. •

The Sounds of Silence

BY STANISLAW BARANCZAK

On the Sky's Clayey Bottom: Sketches and Happenings from the Years of Silence by Zdeněk Urbánek translated by William Harkins

(Four Walls Eight Windows, 232 pp., $17.95)

Put yourself in the shoes of your local district attorney, and you don't have to be a law school graduate to recognize that in prosecuting a case you can choose one of three strategies. If you are obtuse, you pick Strategy Number One: without bothering too much about credible witnesses and convincing evidence, you pin all your hopes on your big final speech, believing that its rhetoric alone will be enough to portray the defendant as a villain and sway the jury in your favor. If you are smart, you will realize that Strategy Number One may work, but then it may not. Therefore you prefer Strategy Number Two: simply to build as solid a case as possible, with lots of different witnesses and lots of of evidence. If you are brilliant, you will choose Strategy Number Three. You will be solidly prepared—and then you will close your case with an artistic flourish, the way a basketball player decides in midair to slam-dunk the ball rather than simply put it through the hoop. You not only let the facts and witnesses speak for themselves, you also question the defendant in a way that makes him unwittingly confess to the crime.

Substitute the writer for the prosecutor, the reader for the jury, the book for the courtroom, and the average citizen of Czechoslovakia before 1989 for the defendant, and you will almost have Zdeněk Urbánek's collection of long and short prose pieces subtitled *Sketches and Happenings from the Years of Silence*. Almost, because one element is still missing in this equation. What was the crime here? What is this indictment all about?

Look again at the book's subtitle. Two different and seemingly unconnected things are interesting about it. The first is

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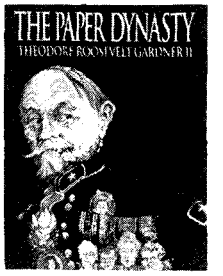

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that Urbánek deliberately avoids the use of any traditional generic term for a brief work of fiction. Such a description of his pieces—short story, novella, vignette—would give them a false appearance of something definite, complete, nested comfortably within this or that conventional formula, easy to classify and to interpret. Instead we get "sketches and happenings," two words bound by their stress on the indefiniteness and inconclusiveness of the report that we are about to hear.

The other thing that the subtitle reveals is the name of the crime that is being prosecuted here. Its name is, simply, "silence." The "years of silence" refer, obviously enough, to Czechoslovakia's four decades of Communist rule, and in particular to its twenty years under Gustav Husák. (Gustav who? It's amazing how efficiently our individual memories take revenge on those who did their best to annihilate memory itself.) It would be wrong on the part of the reader, though, to restrict Urbánek's notion of "silence" to the ruthlessly enforced sort, the kind that became a reality in August 1968 as the first tanks of the Warsaw Pact forces rolled across the Czech border. In fact, it would be hard to find any direct reference to the events of 1968—any direct reference to *any* instances of brutal oppression—in the entire book.

True, the opening piece, a fine little novella, "The Visit," features a secret policeman. ("I'm Hruška from the State Security," he introduces himself; his comical-sounding last name means "a pear" in Czech.) But this poor fellow, "wearing a translucent green-gray plastic raincoat and . . . wiping his face with his handkerchief," is a pitiful figure, not a threatening one, particularly after it turns out that he got the address mixed up and visited the wrong person. This is an exception that only confirms Urbánek's rule. And the rule is that, in his telling, the primary meaning of "silence" is not the drastic suppression of speech that affects, say, a dissident writer, "silenced" by state censorship as a retaliation for his outspokenness in political matters; nor does it refer to any other kind of muffling of the sounds of protest. The "silent" in Urbánek's stories are not those who have something to say but are forbidden to speak. They are those who need not be forbidden to speak because they have nothing to say.

What makes this book something out of the ordinary, then, is the highly unusual combination of two facts—that it was written by one of the most well-known dissident intellectuals of pre-1989 Eastern Europe (Urbánek was a close collaborator of Václav Havel in Charter 77) and that the indictment pronounced in it bears no trace of any "dissident platform" or of any specific political accounts to settle. If the crime prosecuted in this courtroom of a book is defined as "silence," the victims as well as the oppressors, the people as well as the authorities, human nature as well as totalitarianism, are charged with it and put on trial.

One of Urbánek's "sketches and happenings," called "The Sources of History," is a self-portrait in several letters of an average representative of the Czechoslovakian silent majority. A man of peasant stock, he writes to his sister left behind in the village, and his letters show him at consecutive stages of the pitiful white collar career that he tries to make in Prague. It so happens that his career coincides with a rather turbulent period in his country's history: the first letter is written in 1937, just after the death of President Masaryk, the last in 1955. Whoever happens to be top dog in Prague in the years between 1937 and 1955, the Nazis or the Communists, enjoys our hero's unconditional support and admiration (gushes of which are comically interspersed with his requests for country sausage and admonitions to his sister's husband who dares have some convictions of his own). And whoever is a troublemaker, say, those who assassinated Heydrich in 1942, makes him shudder with fear and disgust. "Otylka says that we have only one life to live, and I agree with her," he quotes his wife (who proves even more responsive to the quickly changing historical scene by applying for Communist Party membership immediately after the putsch in 1948).

This story offers a perfect illustration of the human species that inhabits Urbánek's stories. He has no interest in heroes or martyrs. Quite the contrary. Urbánek's protagonists never try to be heroes, and if they do anything on their own initiative, it is in order to fade into the background. They never heed any call that asks them to stand up and be counted, for fear of standing out and being noticed. Years ago, in neighboring Poland, Zbigniew Herbert wrote a great poem precisely about such a division of society into the vocal handful of Don Quixotes and the silent majority of Sancho Panzas. The bitterly ironic poem, called "The Substance," discovered "the sum of everything" in the latter rather than the former:

> those who draw their carts through badly
> paved suburbs
> and flee from fires with a bottle of borsch
> who return to the ruins not to claim the
> dead
> but to recover the pipe of an iron stove
> starved—loving life
> beaten on the face—loving life. . . .
>
> . . . those perish
> who love beautiful words more than fat
> smells
> fortunately they are few
> the nation endures
> and returning with full sacks from its routes
> of retreat
> builds triumphant arches
> for the beautiful dead
> (translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter)

"Loving life," as Herbert's speaker puts it, or being aware that "we have only one life to live," as Urbánek's spineless epistolographer declares, seem at first sight to be innocent and natural attitudes. And yet it is precisely from these attitudes that conformity springs. And conformity brings "silence"—the sort of silence that is, in turn, a manifestation of something much more devastating, the atrophy of language caused by the atrophy of thought (when certain ideas are forbidden, the words in which they would have been discussed quickly disappear) and the atrophy of thought caused by the atrophy of language (if certain words, phrases, or kinds of discourse are forbidden, the ideas that they expressed cannot be communicated to others, cannot be thought up at all).

Thus one of the best stories in Urbánek's collection, the deceitfully simple six-page-long "happening" (as he probably would classify it), "The Festival

Frequent Flier

In the sky's blue eye, distance draws
like a magnet.

Clouds like syllables of sheer ecstasy
and even the blue is fake,
as you've been told.

Here?—where you weren't
just now. And where
you won't be,
soon.

In the time it takes you to read these lines.
In the time it takes you to turn
a page, or smile out the window
at what's rushing, there,
unnamed and of absolutely no consequence,
in the sky's blue eye.

JOYCE CAROL OATES

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by the Lake," shows, with no comment from the narrator, a small-town holiday in a wooded lakeshore area. The festive if slightly dull atmosphere is marred, at one point, by an accident: during an air show one of the parachutists jumping from a plane, a young woman, lands on a tall pine tree and her side is pierced by a dry branch. The clumsy efforts of bystanders to free her (with fatal results) and the wait for an ambulance (which never arrives) fill the story's last page, and they do so, again, without a shred of comment.

It would be silly to look for a "message" here, and yet this story, for all its narrator's seeming lack of emotional involvement, does not leave us with the impression of cold detachment. It would be even sillier to fish for some specifically anti-totalitarian tendency in the story, and yet it *is* a story that could take place in its entirety only in a country such as Husák's Czechoslovakia, with its beer-and-dance festivals for the working class, its air shows that must go on as planned even if the wind grows too strong for parachuting, its ambulances that are always late (provided that there is any telephone around to call them in the first place), and above all its silent crowds, who do not even feel the absurdity of the lives they have been given to live because they are not capable of finding words to express this feeling anymore.

Of course, from the strictly legal point of view, keeping silent about the injustice or the absurdity of life is not as obvious an offense as being an accessory to an act of robbery or violence. Urbánek, a district attorney of the most brilliant sort, is perfectly aware that the indictment of someone for a crime so abstract and passive as "silence" calls for special techniques of persuasion. He knows that fireworks of rhetoric would be downright counterproductive. The total withdrawal of the authoritative narrator in "The Festival by the Lake" reflects the prosecuting author's understanding that he must convince by the weight of evidence alone.

Urbánek's favorite method is the erasure of the narrator; he prefers as complete an absence of his authority as possible. In such pieces, the external, third-person narrator, whose traditional omnipotence has already been severely curtailed, is replaced by a first-person narrator-character who performs his soliloquy or dramatic monologue on his own, unaided but also uninterrupted by any authority other than himself. Such a soliloquy—in written form, and divided into several parts—is performed by the protagonist of "The Sources of History" as he writes consecutive letters to his sister. "The Night Before Sunday School" is a monologue actually spoken, in this instance by someone emotionally disturbed, which may account for his speaking to himself. "For Dreams That Now Have Ceased" is the stream of consciousness of a patient in his hospital bed. "The Music Theater" is composed of the two unrelated inner monologues of two members of the audience at a performance of Arthur Honegger's "Joan of Arc at the Stake." In some other stories, like the excellent "The Figure Swimmer," there is a narrow frame of third-person narrative retained, but only in order to fill it with a much more extensive and dominating dramatic monologue.

Still, in stories such as "The Festival by the Lake," the narrator, ostensibly withdrawn from the world almost to the point of invisibility, is present nonetheless. A piece of evidence—say, a white parachute hanging from a tall pine tree and being tousled by gusts of wind—is offered, ostensibly without comment. Yet as is always the case with real literature, the ideal of neutrality proves impossible, if only because a literary work uses language as its material, and using language is tantamount to making choices between words, figures of speech, types of syntax, and so on, which are all variously charged.

"The Figure Swimmer"—in which the author does little more than put on paper the monologue of an ex-pharmacist pushing 50 who has found a remedy for all the misery of his life in dreaming about "working in films" as a "figure swimmer" ("I thought that maybe you'd make a film of *Rusalka*, and I could be the watergoblin")—offers a clinical example of what silence does to its perpetrators. In the West we associate the notion of a silent majority with the average, the normal. Urbánek, on the contrary, shows us a society in which it is the abnormal that forms the average. In Urbánek's fallen society, "silence" drives the majority to the brink of insanity. It is no accident that so many of his protagonists are mentally disturbed. The profound sadness of his indictment lies precisely in the fact that the prosecution itself is finally unnecessary. It is enough to put the defendants on the witness stand and let them speak to realize that they have already been punished by the deadly effects that their silence has had on their souls.

STANISLAW BARANCZAK is the author most recently of *Breathing Under Water and Other East European Essays* (Harvard University Press).

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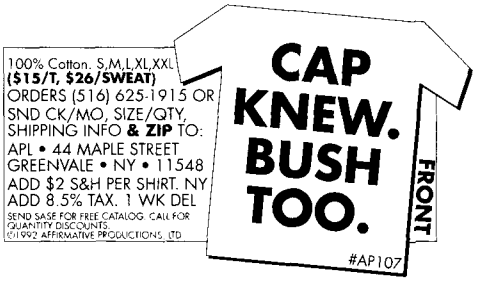
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NEW ORLEANS DIARIST

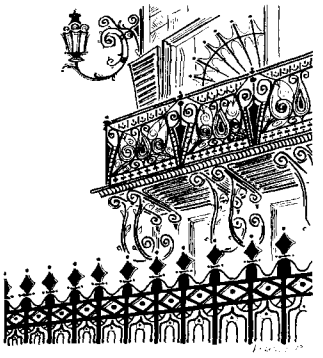
Storyville

EVERY SO OFTEN THERE IS A CRITIcal mass of New Orleanians on the plane heading home, and I feel I've arrived well before I get there. This was the case not so long ago in Atlanta. It was late and people were tired and the flight was overbooked and the airline had made the mistake of letting too many people onto the plane. But there was none of the irritation that you would expect as a matter of course from the citizens of one of those self-serious metropolises, where they say things like time is money and seem to believe that life is to be treated as one long experiment in human efficiency.

INSTEAD, ONE OF THE NEW ORleanians produced a tape deck so that we in the back could play a game of musical chairs around the scarce seats. The problem of where to find the cocktails was quickly solved. Because the aisles were full of people, the stewardesses were unable to push through to the rear and stop the man with the beard from jimmying his way into the liquor cabinet. While he mixed the gin and tonics, one of the flight attendants got herself onto the loudspeaker at the front to say that it was time to get serious. Folks, really. Please.

NOW, THERE IS NO QUICKER WAY to incite a crowd of New Orleanians to further amusement than to insist that they be serious. Guided by some unconscious instinct to make their evening worth telling about, New Orleanians cheer the sudden appearance of a straight character in the midst of their debauchery. The consensus in the back of the plane was that the stewardess's instructions were less a direct order than an opportunity. A few people started dancing. The man in the New Orleans Saints T-shirt proposed a solution to the seating problem. He opened the door to the rear bathroom and hollered up to the stewardess in the New Orleans accent that is barely distinguishable from its first cousin in Brooklyn, "Dawlin, I'll sit in the terlit if you'll just bring me a glass of dat champagne you got."

IF I WERE MAKING UP THIS STORY, it would end just about here. But I'm not. After about fifteen minutes of lighthearted struggle between the forces of light and the forces of Delta, the plane was cleared of excess good humor. Oddly, there was even a row of empty seats behind me; for some reason more people than necessary had decided to get off. Beside me a young man pulled a floppy hat down over his eyes to recover from the preflight revelry. As he snored, a trio of tired, unhappy men came onto the plane to take the empty seats behind me. They all wore the same streaky gray polyester suits and black plastic shoes that might as well have labels on the outside: Made in Eastern Europe. Each of them carried under his arm a pair of telephone books. I watched them closely, disappointed that my neighbor was missing out on the weirdness of a bunch of Eastern Europeans flying to New Orleans reading telephone books. But as I sat there wondering about the phone books, he cocked open one eye and explained, "Not much of a story but they got lots of characters in them."



AS IT HAPPENED, I WAS GOING home to try to finish writing a novel that also had a lot of characters but not much of a story. It had been coming along badly and I was willing to try any literary gimmick that might work, including moving back home to New Orleans. New Orleans, I figured, was just the place to resolve a serious plot problem, filled as it is with a thousand little plots. In New Orleans you are surrounded by people who are just self-conscious enough to see the narrative in their lives but not so self-conscious that they ruin it. My father, who has spent most of his life in New Orleans, is fond of saying that the local writers are grossly overrated because they never have to make anything up. All that Tennessee Williams had to do was find a way to sneak into people's houses and leave a tape recorder running, then have his secretary transcribe the results. Give me a little of that, I thought.

THE HOUSE I FINALLY SETTLED IN for six months in the French Quarter was just around the corner from where Tennessee himself once lounged beside his kidney-shaped pool, naked except for a long fur coat, listening to his tapes of the Kowalskis at home. Faulkner, Percy, Anderson, Capote, Cable, and Hearn had all spun their tales in the surrounding air. It quickly emerged, however, that their ghosts had gone silent; they had been displaced by what Fitzgerald, who had written parts of *This Side of Paradise* nearby, called a "more glittering, a grosser power."

ONE DAY NOT LONG AFTER I'D SETtled in, I went for a walk down my street, to think through one of the many problems with my story. A few minutes into it I bumped into a pack of cameras and a microphone-toting Geraldo Rivera, on whose show I had once been a guest. (The theme was People Who Succeed Too Early In Life. There were four of us, most of whom had slept with Burt Reynolds. Don't ask.) "Hey Geraldo," said I. "Hey Mike," said he. "Still writing those books?" "Trying to," said I, and moved on. I was too happy to have been remembered by a celebrity to consider the deeper significance of his presence.

WITHIN A FEW MORE days it was clear. Coming around another streetcorner, I was stopped by a screech. I looked up and saw a car fishtailing in the middle of the street about two blocks ahead. Men with guns hung out the windows. Slowly I turned and retraced my steps. Coming up behind me was a middle-aged couple, obviously innocent tourists unprepared for what lay ahead. "Turn around and go back," I said, as calmly as possible. "It looks like there's going to be some shooting," I said, very coolly, like it happened every day. "Yeah," the man said, bursting with laughter. "They're doing a movie."

HERE IT MAY SEEM THAT I'M HEADing in the general direction of the usual unhappy ending: *Returning to his hometown, which he has romanticized during his long absence, the young man finds that his past has been stolen from him.* And it was true that the city was being treated as one giant stage set, and that the houses in the French Quarter were filling up with people from Hollywood who wanted a place where they could pretend, for a few weeks each year, to be different from other people in Hollywood. But growing up in New Orleans, you get used to the idea of the city in a slow drift away from its past and into the mainstream of American culture. No, the city even after all those years away was still wonderful. It was my story that stunk.

MICHAEL LEWIS

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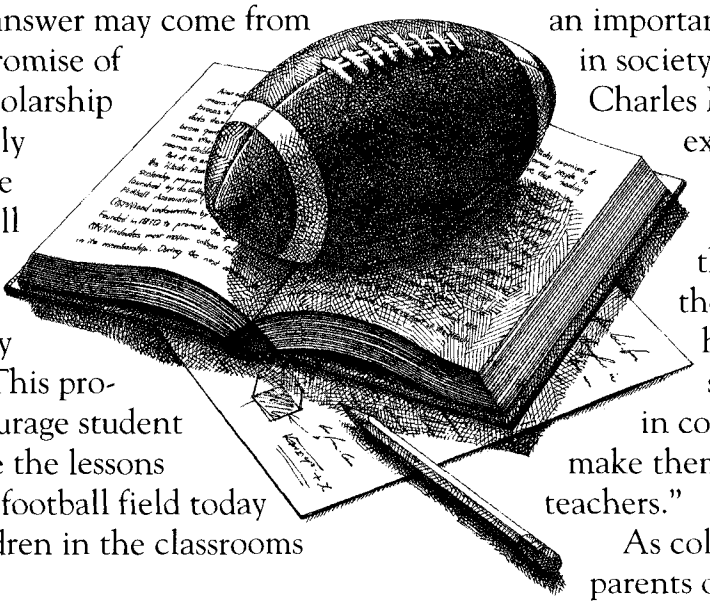
Turning Student Athletes Into Teachers

In the coming years, America's public school system must prepare to educate a new wave of students – the children of the baby boom generation. The U.S. Department of Education projects that from now until 2001, the demand for hiring public school teachers will increase by 18 percent. The question now arises: Who will teach the baby boomers' children?

Part of the answer may come from the "Hitachi Promise of Tomorrow" scholarship program recently launched by the College Football Association (CFA) and underwritten by Hitachi, Ltd. This program will encourage student athletes to take the lessons learned on the football field today and teach children in the classrooms tomorrow.



During the next academic year, the "Hitachi Promise of Tomorrow" program will award $335,000 in scholarships at the 67 CFA member universities. Eligible students include outstanding senior or graduate students who have participated in the college football program as players, trainers, or managers. Each recipient will use his or her $5,000 grant to continue postgraduate studies in education or to meet certification requirements for pursuing a teaching career.

The CFA hopes that the "Hitachi Promise of Tomorrow" program will encourage more young people to enter the teaching profession. "Teaching plays an important but undervalued role in society today," explains Charles M. Neinas, the CFA's executive director. "We'd like to encourage students to pursue this field, and think that the leadership, discipline, hard work and team spirit that students gain in college football will help make them effective classroom teachers."

As college football fans and parents of school-age children, we at Hitachi are proud to be part of the scholarship program. We believe that it will go a long way toward instilling pride in education and the profession of teaching.

For more information, write: Hitachi, P.O. Box 4319, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017.

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